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PRICE ONE PENNY.



["LOOK OUT!" HE INTERRUPTED, GUILTYLY, "LADY HILL HAS FAINTED."]

LADY RAVENHILL'S SECRET.

CHAPTER IX.

The rescue of the two soldiers, and the thrilling circumstances attending that event were duly chronicled in the Local Thunderer, but no clue was afforded that gave any hint of the stranger's name—the stranger who had been the mysterious hero! Some people said he was an officer, staying with another officer in barracks; some said he was a foreign count—some said he belonged to a yacht which had steamed away the next morning; but no one was really one bit wiser than their neighbours.

Molly and her friend often talked about him, wondered who he was, where he came from, and would they ever see him again? Their wish was gratified in a very unpleasant manner before long, and in the following manner. Mrs. Hill had a pretty pony-carriage, and a pretty pony; and was very fond of taking long country drives, accompanied by Molly, and a tiny groom. The pretty pony had

gone permanently lame, and was lately replaced by another—a cob of fourteen hands—black brown, the fashionable colour; extremely fast, showy, and handsome; price, one hundred and twenty guineas. He had been purchased more for looks and style than character; and was his new mistress soon discovered that he was a handful to drive. His mouth was like iron; he was always looking out for something to shy at, and more than once had bolted for a short distance in a very alarming manner. Good-bye to the nice, quiet, peaceful country drives, among lanes where the young ladies could descend and gather wild flowers at their ease; could pick them from the carriage, could pass train, jingling country waggons, and traction engines in safety.

The new pony changed all that. There never was a drive now without some "scene." Mrs. Fortescue had no idea that her animal was but as quiet as a sheep. No one knew his "goings on" except Mary, Nellie, and the groom; and the mistress was ashamed to tell him, lest she should be thought a coward, and afraid of him—which she was in her heart.

So it happened that on a certain fine August afternoon the young ladies set out to pay a country visit at some distance—Nellie, in a new white dress of most recherché description, a sapphire-blue velvet toque, a white lace parasol, and long tan gloves; Mary, in pale pink, with a large white hat, half-smothered in long ostrich feathers, and a parasol, own sister to Nellie's. They thought themselves looking very smart, indeed, and so they were.

Two prettier girls could not have been found in Seabeach. It happened to be Monday, and the pony was fresh—very exceedingly fresh—snorting, and whisking his tail, and making sudden dashes, and rushes, and jerks.

Nellie, with her mouth very firmly set, her hands fully occupied, her eyes on the pony's ears, had no time for conversation, and was driving very well. Passing from the town to the suburbs—from the suburbs to the country, and once out in the lanes—she felt more at ease, and turned to say something to Mary; when, at that instant, a child, or rather a good-sized boy, suddenly jumped from a bank right into the middle of the road; the pony gave a shy—a frightful shy to one side, then

plunge forward, dragging Nellie almost over the splashboard. The fragile light little carriage rocked once, and recovered its balance—another lurch, and over it went, actually upside down—wheels uppermost! The groom and the young ladies were shot out in three different directions, and away tore the pony, full gallop, down the road, with the remains of the trap at his heels. Finally kicking himself quite clear of everything, he made off for a long afternoon's enjoyment in the free open country, and was only caught at nine o'clock that night. Meanwhile, his victim in the road remained immovable for several minutes.

The first person on the ground was the hero of the bathing accident, who had been walking on the downs above, and seen the whole catastrophe. He came down at express speed—sprang into the road, and picked up the lady nearest to him, Miss Fortescue.

"Oh, I'm so bad!" shrieked, feeling helplessly for her hat, which had been fastened into a pancake—her veil split up the middle—her dress in rags—her very gloves in ribbons. "But do look at Nellie, never mind me," hurrying over to where her friend lay in a heap beneath the bank. "She's very much hurt; I'm afraid!" she said, in a terrified voice. "You hold her, and I'll run to the farmhouse for help; and oh! look at Thomas!" in a tone of horror.

Thomas had had his head cut open, and now approached them, bleeding terribly.

"I always knew he would do it, sooner or later," he said, breathlessly; "but Mrs. Hill would not be said, or led. She's badly hurt, miss. I'm afraid, miss!"

"No; I'm not!" said a faint voice, as she struggled to sit up. "Oh! Mary, I hope I have not killed you and Thomas. You seem to have hurt your head, Thomas? This is too much," staggering to her feet. "To turn us out" in the road, kick the carriage to pieces, and go off with himself! Look at my arms and hands!" displaying a mass of broken skin and bruises. "And—oh!" suddenly catching a glimpse of the stranger, who had been staying behind her all the time, and had assisted her to rise, though she never noticed him. "It's you again—you seem to come in for these kind of things!" mockingly.

"I'm sorry to say I do," he answered, gravely. "I'm afraid you are badly hurt."

"No, not very badly. Thomas looks much worse. Here, Mary, if you could get at my handkerchief, he might tie it round his head. Just look at our clothes—we are like millers—ragged millers. Where is my hat?" she asked, looking round. "Thank you, very much," to the stranger who had picked it up, and began to flatten it into shape. "It is a mercy we were not all killed; and now what are we to do next?" looking helplessly down the road, where part of the carriage and two or three cushions were strewn in the dirt, "and here we are. That is what remains of the trap, but where's the pony?"

"Dead I hope," exclaimed Mary, viciously. "Hateful little vicious beast! I knew he was going to do something to-day."

"Why did you not tell me in time, my good girl?" said her friend, with a smile, "and we might have got out and walked. We will have plenty of walking as it is—three miles to Seabeach!"

"If you will be advised by me," said the young man, who had picked up two parasols, a bracelet, and a card-case, "I would humbly suggest your walking down to that farm-house in the trees, resting, bathing your cuts and bruises, and sending into Seabeach for a fly. I will fetch one for you, if you like," politely.

"Thank you very much indeed. We will start off at once. No use standing here, like—like Marcus among the ruins of Carthage, is there?"—laughing. "And I dare say we shall be able to find some little boy who will run into Seabeach, and I hope they will be able to give us a cup of tea at the farm-house."

"That is what you ladies always have

craving for. No matter what your affliction, tea—a cup of tea—whether you are crying, or going to be married, or have met with an accident, or come home from a dance!"

"Are the ladies of your family very partial to that cup that cheers, but does not inebriate?" she asked, with a smile.

"I am not so fortunate as to have any ladies in my family," he said, rather stiffly. "You seem to be very badly hurt," surveying the hand from which she was endeavouring to disengage a tattered glove with great dismay. "Allow me, and I will remove it," and he did quickly, easily, and painlessly, with as apt fingers as if he had been a surgeon; and in taking off the glove he discovered a wedding-ring. Yes, this pretty enthusiastic girl, whom he had seen down on the beach in a passion of tears, who bore her upset now so courageously, and made so light of many deep scars and cuts and bruises, was actually a married woman! Who would have thought it!

In time they made their way down to the farmhouse and told their pitiful tale, and were received by the beautiful-looking mistress of the house with much sympathy and, so to speak, open arms. Thomas's head was bandaged; a boy was despatched for a lady, to be ready in the shady, sanded parlour; and Mary and Nellie were taken upstairs to a low room with one small window to have their wounds attended to. Scrapes and bruises were the worst—no sprains and no bones broken. Nellie's pretty fresh white frocking from her shoulders in rags. "It was quite awful," she said, "you could see her bare arms." And she gladly accepted an old white China silk shawl in which to wrap herself, which white silk shawl was Mrs. Merton's, the farmer's wife's pearl-of-pride, and the very head and front of her wardrobe. After awhile, they having dusted their dresses and smoothed their hair, and repaired themselves generally, came down to tea, to which the strange gentleman, who was lounging outside, was also bidden.

Thomas had been in the kitchen, and soon they were seated round the shiny black oak table, partaking of tea and cream, brown bread and fresh butter, as sociably as if they had known each other all their lives, and yet the larger number of the company did not know each other's names.

They were all in capital spirits, and laughed and joked about the dismasted condition of the carriage, the probable whereabouts of the pony, and so on.

"Bad—temporal, vicious brute," said Lord Ravenhill—for, of course, you have long ago guessed that it is he. "Not fit for any lady to drive. I wonder"—looking across at Nellie, who, wrapped in the silken shawl, with an unusual colour in her cheek, and pretty little loose locks of her hair protruding over her forehead, was looking particularly well—"I wonder," he said, slowly, "that your husband bought such a brute, or allowed you to drive it."

At this seemingly harmless speech the delicate colour sank from her cheeks, from her lips, and she said in a very cool, frosty sort of tone—

"My—my husband had nothing to say to it. It is nothing to him."

Lord Ravenhill felt that he was snubbed; that he had been making too free with this dainty, proud young lady with the patrician features and the deep violet eyes. Something more than her mere words conveyed her annoyance—her eyes, her look, her little chill smile—and he turned for consolation to the other young lady, the dark-eyed, piquant-looking companion, and began to talk of something else; and Mrs. Merton, who had been out into the kitchen for a fresh supply of cream, came in and made a grand diversion by asking them if they had seen the grand account of the two men who were nearly drowned—the whole thing was in the *Seabeach Express*?

"Yes, we not only saw it in the paper, but we witnessed the thing itself!" said Nellie, who had recovered her good humour; "and this

gentleman was the one who went out in the boat and brought them in," nodding her head, and smiling over at her *vis-à-vis*.

"Bless my heart! you don't say so. I'm proud to see you under my roof, sir. It was a wonderful fine thing to do!"

"No, nothing, nothing at all," reddening a good deal. "I can't allow you to be letting the cat out of the bag with Mrs.—Mrs.—Mrs.—?" looking across at Nellie, interrogatively.

"Hill, my name is Hill," she said, quietly.

"Just the half of mine," she returned, with a smile, and then followed the two girls to the open door, which led into an old-fashioned garden, blooming with stocks, and pink and pantries, and large bushes of fragrant lavender.

"And won't you tell us the whole of it?" said Molly, plucking a spray and putting it in her bosom.

"We always had an idea we should meet you again, at least I had," said Nellie, colouring. "I had a presentiment that I had not seen the last of you."

"And you had not," smiling. What handsome dark eyes she had!

"No, and I am so glad to have an opportunity of telling you how much I—we—I—" stammering—"thought of what you did the other day. It is a relief to me to tell you," blushing.

"I am afraid you are making a great deal of a very trifling matter," he said, colouring also. "Please do not take the public into your confidence and tell them that it was I. Spare me, I beseech you!"

"How can we do that?" said Mary, with an amused shrug of her shoulders. "You forget that we do not know your name."

"That omission is soon remedied," he said, cheerfully. "My name is Ravenhill—Hugh Ravenhill, I—Look out Miss. What's your name?" he interrupted, guiltily. "Mrs. Hill has fainted! There! Lay her down on the grass and I'll run in for some water."

Coming back in an instant with Mrs. Merton, he said, "I thought she was a good deal more hurt than she pretended. She has been keeping up too much, and now she has collapsed. You rub her hand—not that one, that is the one that is hurt," he said to Mary, authoritatively.

Mary who was nearly as overwhelmed by the news as her friend, did not seem to know what she was doing, but left all "the fanning and scent-bottle business," as he called it, to Mrs. Merton and himself.

After a while their efforts were crowned with success, and the patient came round and staggered up and sat down on a bench outside the parlour window, looking as white as a sheet, and very much upset and ill.

"I told you you were more hurt than you pretended," said Lord Ravenhill, confidently. "You ought to see a doctor the moment you go home. Such a capsise as you had is not to be laughed at. Do you think a little brandy would do her good, Mrs. Merton?" turning to that elderly dame with an air of critical inquiry.

"Not for me," said Nellie, suddenly finding her tongue, "not brandy for millions; the very smell of it is enough. Oh! here is the fly at last," she added in a tone of intense relief, and their cavalier hastened to the avenue-gate to throw it open and hold parley with the driver; and whilst he was away Mary said in a significant low tone, "I suppose we must give him a sent back to town, eh?"

"Yes," assented the other, wearily, "I suppose we must," and so Lord Ravenhill drove back to Seabeach with his wife and her friend, little knowing who one of his companions was.

He was very kind and attentive to them; made the coachman drive slowly over rough places, handed them out carefully at their own hall door, and declared his intention of calling to inquire the next day; and, having seen them safely on their own premises he took off his hat and walked away in the direction of the docks.

"Mary," said her friend, when they had told

their adventures, and despatched seekers in quest of trap and pony, and reached the retirement of their own room, "did you ever know anything so awful as this?" casting her hat down upon the bed with a gesture of desperation. "It's too extraordinary! Fancy his being my husband!"

"And fancy your husband being so nice!" smiling approvingly.

"What am I to do? He will be coming here; he is Teddy's friend and ours now in a way, and I am sure we shall see a great deal of him. But if he ever has a glimmering of an idea of whom I am, I shall leave you all and run away to America!"

"And if you do, you will be a great goose for your pains! Why should you run away?"

"Because—because—I would—and should."

"Because in no reason," argumentatively.

"Here, Mary!"—suddenly snatching up a prayer-book—"swear to me on this, that you will never, never tell him!"

"No need of swearing," said Mary. "I'll promise, and that will be enough. I've kept your secret pretty well, and I am not going to tell him now, unless you give me leave."

"Then you may be certain of one thing. I'll never do that!"

the-way, who is he, and where is he?" he asked, with well-dissembled nonchalance.

"I should be uncommonly obliged to you if you could tell me," said Teddy, squaring his elbows on the table, and blowing a cloud of smoke into the air, "for it is more than I know myself!"

"You don't say so!" said his companion, in amazement. "This is all humbug! You must have some idea!"

"Not the smallest, upon my honour, my dear fellow!"

"Is she a widow?" inquisitively.

"I cannot tell you that, either."

"But your mother and sister know?" interrogatively.

"Yes, they know right enough, I imagine, and for once a pair of women have been able to keep a secret."

"But why should there be any mystery about it?" demanded the other, angrily. "If the man is dead, he is dead, and there's an end of it! And if he is not, he must be under some cloud and unable to show up, for she is a very pretty girl. It's not likely he deserted her! She can't be more than one-and-twenty."

"Oh, she is more than that," said Teddy, reflectively. "I'll tell you all I know about it. When I came home last time from India I found Mrs. Hill installed as a permanent inmate—a second daughter to my mother, and a sister to Mary, with whom she was at school. I tried to find out who she was, where she came from, and all that sort of thing, but my mother said that her former history was very painful, and she did not wish it to be talked about, nor the husband. At first I came to the conclusion that Mr. Hill was in the land of the living, but now I have quite made up my mind that he is dead and, let us hope, buried."

"Why so?" asked his companion, incredulously.

"Because he is never mentioned. She never gets any letters from him, but not only that, there is a kind of silence about him that I could not exactly explain, that makes me feel pretty sure that he is not in the land of the living. Besides, she was in the deepest mourning when she came to my mother, and she has a handsome joisture."

"And the mourning and the jointure look like a widow, you think?" said Lord Ravenhill, lazily.

"What else?"

"What else, indeed! I dare say she married some scamp in her teens, and he led her a life for a while, and then was obliging enough to make his exit to another world; but somehow she looks far more like an unmarried girl than either wife or widow."

"Nevertheless, she is both sa'e enough," said Captain Fortescue, decidedly.

"Well, we need not count on Mr. Hill's company," returned his host, pushing back his chair and rising. "You must try and get your mother to come on a cruise. I'll take the best of care of the family and not bring them to grief; you will talk her round for me. Come along and take a turn on the pier, it's getting rather stuffy below. Have another cigar. There's the box, help yourself."

The next afternoon Nellie was sufficiently recovered to make her appearance in the drawing-room, looking extremely fresh and young and pretty in a soft white dress, with a silver belt and necklace, and a bunch of carnations at her throat. Teddy Fortescue, the tea-tray, and Lord Ravenhill, entered simultaneously, and were all made equally welcome. This was the meeting she had been bracing herself up to for the last four days. She wanted to talk to him as a complete stranger, of course, yet knowing all the time he was her cousin and her husband, and then to let him go his own way, and allow their lives once more to drift apart.

"I am glad to see you down, Mrs. Hill," he said, taking a low chair close to the tea-table. "I hope you are quite recovered from the effects of your accident."

"If we could get leave!" dubiously.

"Why not? Of course he can! And perhaps Mrs. Hill's husband would join us, too? By-

her eyes fastened on a satin sachet that she was embroidering for a bazaar.

"What had happened to her?" he asked himself, irritably. Had he offended her in any way? She was quite different to the girl on the beach and in the farm-house. Cool, self-contained, reserved, and distant!

"I hope you are going to get rid of that black cob," he said, after a second's hesitation. "He is not fit for any lady to drive—a hard-mouthed, vicious, dangerous animal."

"Yes, I remember you saying you wondered my husband allowed me to drive such a brute!" she said, with a peculiar smile.

"Yes, and I put my foot in it. I mean, I said the wrong thing, as I always do," he replied, in a lower voice. "As I—I understand that you are a widow, and I beg your pardon for my stupid blunder most sincerely."

"You did not think I looked like a widow, I suppose," she observed, with her eyes bent upon her work, but her heart beating so fast that it seemed almost to choke her.

"No, since you ask me. I did not then, and I do not now."

"Appearances are deceitful sometimes," she said, raising her eyes, and looking into his face with a strange expression of mingled resentment and amazement.

Widow, indeed! What would he say if some wicked fairy were to whisper in his ear that the supposed widow was his own wife?

"And is it long since—since you have lost your husband?" he asked, with an air of well-feigned sympathy.

"About three years!" she returned, her eyes again glued to her work.

What pretty little dainty hands she had, thought the young man beside her—so thin, and small, and taper! But why were they shaking so strangely?—trembling so much that the needle seemed hardly under the command of those fairy fingers!

Perhaps the late Mr. Hill was really a sore subject. His suspicion was realized by a low voice suddenly saying,—

"Lord Ravenhill, please never speak to me of my husband again! It is, as you can imagine, a very painful subject."

"Oh! of course, certainly," he stammered. "In fact, I'm afraid, that for a stranger you will think I have been uncommonly free and easy, and inquisitive and rude!"

"Free and easy, and inquisitive and rude! How many more names are you going to call yourself?" she asked, with a smile.

"They seemed to be getting on very well," said Mary to herself, as she glanced stealthily at this most extraordinary pair. And what a handsome couple they were! What marvellous self-command Nellie had brought to her aid!

She was working away and laughing, and chatting, and smiling as if her neighbour was the most ordinary, everyday acquaintance.

Ah! Mary—you don't know as much as you think! Appearances are deceitful."

Soon a large flock of visitors were ushered in, and scattered about the apartments, drinking tea and eating cake, and retailing the local gossip to Captain, Mrs., and Miss Fortescue. The couple at the other side of the table remained undisturbed, and continued their conversation with uninterrupted zest.

"So!" said a discontented daddy to himself, as he glared irritably at the pair in question, then at his own reflection in the glass, then at them again. "So the pretty widow has come off her high horse at last, and is letting that dark fellow that owns the big steam-yacht make himself very agreeable to her!"

He was talking very earnestly—very eagerly—about something or other, and she was listening quite complacently. Perhaps she would do the usual thing, and give him one of her awful snubs soon; and send him away like many others—a sadder, if not a wiser man! He was an uncommonly good-looking man, too. May be that was the reason she was giving him such a long tether!

"There! He has got it at last!" he said to

himself, with great glee, as he saw the yacht-man push back his chair with a gesture of impatience, put down his tea-cup, and move over to where his friend, Captain Fortescue was exercising all his attractions on two young ladies. What had Nellie said to drive him from her side? You shall hear.

After talking very pleasantly for some time about ordinary every-day topics, Lord Ravenhill had suddenly harked—back again to the subject of the black cob.

"I beg you will get rid of him, Mrs. Hill; he is not safe, I assure you he is not! He might do for a Polo pony, but he is certainly not cut out for harness. Send him up to Tattersall's, and oblige me!"

"Oblige you? Why should I oblige you, Lord Ravenhill?" she asked, with a faint smile, and raised eyebrows.

"Well, oblige your friends, among whom I hope you will permit me to enrol myself!"

To the request there was no answer for some seconds.

"May I? May I consider myself your friend?" he urged.

"No!" she burst out, suddenly. "No! I don't want your friendship!"

Her companion gazed at her for a moment in stupefied astonishment. This was plain English with a vengeance!

"All right, Mrs. Hill," he answered, at last, reddening even under his sunburnt skin. "I'm not a fellow to intrude myself where I am not wanted, nor to offer my friendship twice!" So saying he got up and left her, as we have already seen.

Nellie glanced after him as he walked across the room. It was wisest—far wisest—to put a barrier between them at the very outset, she said to herself, valiantly. Friendship might lead to something else, to some ridiculous complications. Best remain strangers.

She was a widow he had met accidentally at the sea-side; and he was a friend of Teddy Fortescue's, and there the matter must end—should end—should end! He was not a man to offer his friendship twice, as he had said. But what possessed him to offer it at all?

She stole a good look at him, as she stood talking to Mary Fortescue—a leisurely, critical stare. She could not help remarking that he was one of the handsomest men she had ever seen—tall, slight, and well-bred looking, with a rather grave, dark face.

"My husband!" she said to herself, inaudibly of course, and the blood mounted to her temples as she uttered the three syllables. How odd it seemed! At any rate, he was a man of whom she could justly be proud, and she there and then felt a secret, strange, little thrill of satisfaction, as she took in every inch of his well-cut features, the slightly haughty carriage of his head, and his graceful, well-knit figure.

"He is furious with me," she said, to herself, "and it is just as well, I daresay if he had the most distant idea of who I was, he would be somewhat astounded; he would not think so much of me then—his toy, as I was to have been."

Nevertheless, when the little tea party broke up and Lord Ravenhill took his leave, she could not refrain from giving him her hand in answer to a very distant bow—and out of pure contrariness—a most charming, bewitching smile, the memory of which he carried away with him, and treasured most foolishly for three whole days.

CHAPTER XI.

"I WONDER at you, Nellie! I really am not easily astonished, but you astonished me this afternoon!" said her friend, coming into her room as she was dressing for dinner. "Such cool self-possession I never saw! How you could keep your countenance and chatter away in that charming, everyday manner to your own husband—speaking to him in that character for the first time—is quite beyond my comprehension! Were you not nervous?"

Were you not nearly bursting out laughing, or crying, or something?"

"I was nervous enough," said her friend, twisting her long hair into a neat coil, and inserting various hair pins with much judgment and deliberation; "and I was nearly hysterical too, when he asked me point-blank if I was a widow? It seemed such an outrageous question—coming—coming—from my husband himself!"

"You appeared to be getting on swimmingly at first!" said Mary, seating herself beside the dressing-table, and staring at her friend with a long, exhaustive stare. "And did you say you were a widow?" raising her eyebrows.

"I said that I had lost my husband three years ago, which I fancy he imagines to mean yes!"

"And after?" said Mary, briefly.

"Well, then he was inclined to be very sympathetic, but I soon put an end to all that by telling him that I would take it as a personal favour if he never alluded to my husband in any way whatever!"

"Well, I must say you have plenty of nerve," gasped Mary.

"Have I not?" triumphantly; "and then he asked if he might be enrolled as a friend. What do you think of that?" waving a lily-white hand towards her companion, with a gesture of imperious interrogation.

"And you said—"

"And I said certainly not. Fancy such a suggestion the third time of meeting, and fancy him trying to strike up a friendship with a pretty widow like me!"—laughing—"when all the time he has a wife in the background!—my precious self. Again, imagine me in two characters—wife and widow! I imagine me trying to destroy my own domestic peace as the gay Mrs. Hill, and then coming down—rigid virtue and outraged feelings—the cast-off wife in the shape of Lady Ravenhill herself! Wouldn't he open his eyes?"

"I should rather imagine he would," assented her companion, quietly. "And when is this little comedy or tragedy coming off? When are you going to declare yourself?"

"Never," returned Nellie, shutting her dressing-case with a loud bang. "Never, my dear. He will go away and forget Mrs. Hill, who nearly snapp'd his nose off, and never guess how near he was to Eleanor Lady Ravenhill!"

"Nonsense! nonsense!" said her friend, jumping up impatiently. "Of course he will find out who you are yet; and indeed, I think I'll give him a hint—"

"If you ever do, Mary," interrupted her companion, hastily, "I'll never speak to you again. Let well alone. We are very well as we are. Please, please don't meddle."

"I know it is fatal to mix oneself up with married people; but Nellie, dear, it seems flying in the face of Providence. You have your eyesight restored to you—you are twenty, pretty, and everything you ought to be!"

"Extremely obliged," making a deep curtsey.

"And it is as plain as can be that he likes you very much."

"But he has no business to like me, you bad girl, when he thinks I am Mrs. Hill and he has a wife already; it is most improper and abominable."

"Perhaps he knows who you are," suggested Mary, serenely.

"The fates forbid!" turning pale at the thought. "No! no, there is no fear of that. Next time we meet I shall certainly ask him about his wife!"

"You won't!" incredulously.

"Won't I? and you shall hear where she is as far as he knows, and all about her," nodding her head encouragingly.

"Then you are really not going to declare yourself?"

"Certainly not; why should I? It is not in the bond. I like my liberty and he likes his, you may be sure!"

"Don't you think him awfully nice and good-looking?"

"Hem! middling." (Oh! Nellie, what a story.)

"I think he is one of the handsomest men I ever saw," said Mary, emphatically.

"Oh! fie, Mary; not nearly as handsome as Charley," mischievously.

"Charley is a dear fellow, but not a bit good-looking, you know very well; in fact, to every one but me he is plain!"

"Plain, is he? Well, never mind, handsome is that handsome does, and, by-the-way, I hope, talking of handsome people, that my dress will be down from Madame Ellis no later than to-morrow night, for the Dragoons' ball on Thursday?"

"Do you think he will be there?" inquired Mary, eagerly.

"Who, Charley?"

"What nonsense! Your husband, of course."

"Hush—the walls have ears. I daresay he will, as he says he likes dancing, and if he is I should not be surprised if for once I was to indulge in a mild flirtation. Fancy flirting with one's husband of three years' standing and more," making a grimace at herself in the glass. "Won't it be funny?"

"If you don't take care you will burn your fingers, madam, and be caught in your own trap," said Mary, impressively.

"And what is what you so pleasantly call 'my own trap,' if I may ask?" she said, airily.

"I think you are going to make your husband fool enough to fall desperately in love with his own wife, and then throw him over at the eleventh hour, in order to avenge yourself on him for some imagined wrongs."

"Imagined wrongs!" she echoed. "Much you know about it, my dear girl. Come along," taking her arm and sweeping out of the apartment. "There's the dinner bell, and as I had no tea I am quite ready for my evening meal."

"Horrid prosaic little wretch," said Mary, pinching her ear. "No more heart, and no more sentiment in your body than that door."

"Oh! not so hard as all that. I could not hold my cup and saucer this afternoon, my hand shook so. So you see there is hope for her yet. I am pretty bad when I have to forego what I like almost better than dinner and breakfast put together—my cup of afternoon tea."

And then she broke into song,—

"Give, oh! give to me
A sweet and fragrant cup of tea."

* * * * *

The next day the saunterers on the Parade had something new to stare at. The Marquis of Westbury had come round with his yacht, and disembarked several very smart-looking people, who were up at the "Granville Arms" for a few days, whilst the yacht underwent some slight repairs. There were Lord and Lady Westbury, Mrs. Burton Montagu, Mrs. Derwent, Mr. Corballis, and Sir Otto Browne. Their costumes made many people stare and turn their heads as they walked down the Parade, and criticised the appearance of everyone in rather loud tones.

Mrs. Burton Montagu was attired in a bright red cloth tailor-made suit, which had a most startling effect; a wide-brimmed sailor hat, with a red ribbon and a red parasol, completed her "get up."

Lady Westbury was dressed in bright blue serge, braided with gold; and Mrs. Derwent was comparatively quiet in a well-fitting dark blue costume, with a white waistcoat.

As they talked, and laughed, and lounged along, they hailed with delight the approach of a friend, and "spoke him," or hailed him, as they would have said, a long way off.

"Why Ravenhill! Why, old bird! What wind has blown you to these parts?" demanded Lord Westbury of his brother peer, with a loud resounding slap on the back.

He was accosted with equal effusion by the three ladies, especially, needless to say, by Amy, who looked up into his face with her most confidential smile, and murmured,

"Dear Hugh, who would have expected to meet you here?"

"We are so glad to see you! It's a perfect godsend to meet a 'familiar' in this very slow-looking place! Come along," said Lady Westbury, "come and walk between Amy and me, and tell us all about yourself. We thought you had gone to Norway weeks ago!"

"No, I'm not going this season, I believe!"

"You believe!" mimicking his accent. "And what is the attraction here? Come now, 'confession is good for the soul!'"

At this instant they met and passed Mrs. Hill and Mary, who were suddenly confronted by these brilliant strangers, and who passed Lord Ravenhill with a smile and a bow.

"Hello!" said Sir Otto, now speaking for the first time at the full pitch of a naturally robust organ. "What a stunning pretty girl, the one in white! So that's the attraction, is it, eh! old fellow? You need not blush. I admire your taste. Any more of the same pattern in these parts?" facetiously.

Lord Ravenhill, needless to state, did not relish this graceful bit of badinage at all, neither did Mrs. Derwent, who glanced back, in defiance of all polite customs, after the two girls who were going up the Parade—tall, slight, and well-dressed; thorough ladies every inch to judge from their walk and appearance.

"Which of them is it, Hugh?" she inquired, with a spiteful little smile.

"The one in white, of course," put in Sir Otto, with a laugh; "she was by long chalks the best looking."

"Ah! we must find out who she is, and all about her," said Constance, sweetly. "You will have to bring them to call on us at the Granville, Hugh, if they are friends of yours! Bring them to see us, do!"

"Hardly worth their while, when you are only here for a few days," he returned, somewhat ungraciously.

"Oh, I say! Now don't be childish," said Lady Westbury, frankly; "share your good things with us, and don't be greedy. I should like to see more of that girl with the pretty grey eyes. So, as you know I am not a person to be denied, you will have to get her to come round and call at the Granville this very afternoon—the sooner we all know each other the better. You all agree with me?" looking smilingly round the circle, who were now standing in a group, and taking up the best part of the middle of the Parade, as if it was their exclusive private property. The idea was carried with acclamation, but Lord Ravenhill would not commit himself further than by saying he would "see about it" next day.

Lady Westbury, backed up by Mrs. Derwent, was so very insistent, that at last Lord Ravenhill had to hint to Mrs. Fortescue that some friends of his were staying at the Granville, and he would be very glad if she would call on them, which she did, accompanied by Mary—Mary only—for Nellie had declared once for all that she would not go and "wait upon them," as she called it. She did not like the look of them; they seemed bored and fast, and did not appeal to her in any way. She and Mary had not failed to remark them that morning on the parade, and made a mental note that "they did not think much of Lord Ravenhill's friends!" The bold, black-eyed woman looked the worst, they agreed—her face was so white, her eyes so sunken. She looked like a tragedy queen, with the manners of a barmaid.

Nellie's absence was a great disappointment to the party in general, and a great relief to Lord Ravenhill in particular. Somehow, although she snubbed him so, he did not want pretty, girlish-looking, unsophisticated Mrs. Hill to be intimate with "these people," as he called them to himself. What was it about her that was so taking? Everything he told himself, frankly—her face, her smile, her eyes, her pretty figure, and her merry laugh. How could she laugh and look so happy and careless if she had gone through a sea of trouble, as hinted by Captain Fortescue? Some people

were of an elastic nature, and cast all their cares behind them—and perhaps she was one of them. When he had left Mrs. Fortescue at her own door, he went out for what he called "a lively breather" on the downs; hired a nag from a livery stable, and started for a solitary gallop, partly to get away from this incubus at the Granville, if not altogether.

"There is nothing like a good rousing gallop for cleansing away the cobwebs," he said to himself, as he brought his panting, borrowed steed to a walk at the bottom of a long slope.

Just disappearing over the crest of it he saw a lady, followed by a groom.

"Could it be Mrs. Hill? Mrs. Hill!" he said to himself, impatiently. "I seem to have her on the brain; every fair-haired girl I take to be Mrs. Hill. I don't even know if she rides. However, we shall soon see," and coming up at a smart canter, he did see, and it was Mrs. Hill, riding a very handsome black hunter, and looking charming in a neat brown riding habit.

"This is a stroke of good luck, Mrs. Hill," he said, joining her, and taking off his hat. "May I be your escort, for want of a better?"

"Oh, certainly," she answered, with a pretty little nod. "It is rather dull work always riding by oneself."

"Does Miss Fortescue not ride, then?" riding up confidently close.

"No, she is afraid, and hates it, for one thing, and has not got a horse for another."

"This, I suppose is your own animal," pointing at her handsome, well-bred mount—"not hired?"

"Yes; Blackbird is my own,"—patting his back—"and so is Butterfly, the one the groom is on. I keep them at livery stables not far from Marine Parade."

Lord Ravenhill glanced at Butterfly, another fine horse, who must have cost three figures at the least, and remembered that Mrs. Hill was a richly-jointed widow, and held his tongue.

She looked to her greatest advantage in the saddle, and rode well, and seemed perfectly at her ease as Blackbird capered and shied and jumped in pure exuberance of youth and spirits.

"He has not been out for ages!" she said, apologetically, as he shied at a sheep right across the other house. "If you don't mind we will have a gallop, and I'll take it out of him," and in another moment away they went at the top of their speed, with the wind whistling past their riders' ears, and the springing, green turf under their feet.

Mrs. Hill was no mere Rotten-row rider. She put Blackbird over several sheep hurdles in a very workmanlike manner, and elicited a further amount of admiration and respect from her astonished cavalier, who half-an-hour ago was not aware that riding was among her accomplishments.

Riding was, of all others, the accomplishment in a woman that took him by storm, being a very keen first flight man himself, and spending from November till April in eager and daily pursuit, Sundays excepted, of the sport of kings!

"I had no idea you were such a first-rate horsewoman, Mrs. Hill!" he said, a, slightly out of breath and flushed with their late gallop, she brought her Blackbird once more to a walk.

"Oh! I'm not much yet," she answered, in a disparaging tone. "I never was on anything but a pony till about two years ago."

"Then you never rode until after your bus—"

"Hush! I told you never to mention him!" she said, impatiently. "Next time you forget we shall be cut—" nodding her head impressively.

"All right," he said, laughing. "I'll remember. And you never rode anything but a pony before?"

"Yes, when I was a child; but I used to stick on very well; and a pony is twice as hard to ride as a horse—it twists and turns

round so sharply under you, and they mostly have such awful mouths!"

"Yes, quite true. You would not ride so well now if you had not served a good apprenticeship to the pony, and—where did you say?"

"I did not say anywhere," she answered, with a laugh; "and I do not see why you are to have all the questions to yourself. I am going to take a leaf out of your book," she continued, looking at him under her long eyelashes. "Is it true, Lord Ravenhill that you are a married man?"

If a shell had exploded on the grass beneath him he could not have been more taken aback than he was by this simple question. However, after a second's hesitation, he found his voice, and said very quietly,—

"Quite true, I am a Benedict, but how did you know?"

"How? how?" he asked himself anxiously. Not that he had any real desire to conceal the fact, but he had almost lost sight of it latterly himself.

"Oh, a little bird told me," she said, coolly settling her reins. "That is question number one. Now tell me"—leaning towards him in a pretty, confidential attitude—"where is Lady Ravenhill?"

"I don't know," he answered, gloomily gnawing his moustache.

"Nor care?" she inquired, with a mischievous laugh.

"Well, since you will have it, nor care," he replied.

"What a model husband!" knocking a fly off her horse's shoulder. "Now tell me something else. How does she put up with such treatment?"

"Come, now, Mrs. Hill, this is not fair," he said, in a tone of deep expostulation. "You won't let me speak of your husband—I mean—I'm sure I beg your pardon—past, and yet I'm to tell you all my domestic affairs. Now, I call that hard lines!"

"Not a bit of it!" cheerfully. "However, I will only ask one more question, and that is, Does your wife approve of your making overtures of friendship to pretty girls—for I am only a girl—like me?"

"I'm sure I can't say, but I don't suppose she would care."

"I shouldn't like it if you were my husband, you know," with a killing smile, and another look from underneath her eyelashes.

"What is the harm of friendship? It's not as if I was—was—was," stammering and getting rather red.

"Was what? Come!"

"Making love to you, since I may speak plainly!"

"No, of course not," scornfully; "but somehow friendship between a young married man—like you—I speak plainly too, you see, and boldly—for I'm twice as bold on horseback as anywhere else. Friendship between you and a young matron like me," smiling and blushing very much, "is not looked on with favour by the world at large—now is it?"

"The sort of friendship that I offer you would be," he answered, doggedly. "What I mean—I ask for nothing—only if ever you were in trouble or danger of any kind to come and help you. I ask you to feel—since you told me the other day you were alone in the world—that, in any crisis, you may know that you can always fall back upon me. There is no harm in that. I ask for no return."

"But why should you make such a strange offer to an almost total stranger?" knocking off another fly; "or is it a little way you have?" smiling.

"You are no stranger to me now. I cannot explain it. I feel as if I had known you for years." Certainly Hugh was getting hot and Nellie grew strangely red. "I cannot tell what it is that makes me like you, for as a rule I hate women like poison."

"Thank you!" nodding her acknowledgment with a smile.

"I suppose there is some old sort of affinity between us?"

"Us!" she cried, heartily. "Please speak for yourself."

"Well, I will!" I cannot tell how it is; but" —taking his courage in both hands—"I like you better than any girl I ever saw. That day on the beach I felt it the instant I spoke to you. We cannot help ourselves!" he concluded, lamely, but in a tone of deep conviction.

"Can we not? I wonder what your wife would say, if she could hear you?"

"I don't care, if she *did*," recklessly; "I would repeat every word I have said to you this afternoon to her, and not feel the least afraid. In fact, I don't care if the whole town of Seabeach heard me"—defiantly.

"But I should care very much indeed! Fancy what they would say of me, if they heard a married man telling me he liked me better than any girl he ever met in his life, and that he did not care if his wife heard him? By-the-by, what is she like?" looking at him curiously.

"She—she—I don't know; in short, as you are so inquisitive, I may as well tell you that I have never seen her."

"Never seen her!" she echoed, turning her lovely face full on him. "What are you saying? Just think."

"I married my cousin, and succeeded to my uncle's fortune as an inducement. She is blind, and wore a veil. I never saw her face. We parted by her wish at the church door forever, she said, never to meet again."

"And you have never met since?"

"Never."

"Have you no idea where she is?"

"No, I often tried to discover, through our man of business, but in vain. She is abroad, I fancy. I heard she was at Aix-les-Bains three years ago, and was likely to remain on the continent. Really a miserable state of affairs, is it not?" he asked, gravely.

"Would you not like to see her?" she asked, without making any direct reply to his question.

"Yes, I should. I've often asked myself if I was not a mercenary wretch to make such a marriage!"

"And you were!" put in Mrs. Hill, candidly.

"I was in debt—that was it. Awfully hard up—and there was no other way—not one."

"No other way than this blind woman's fortune, eh?"

"Yes," he assented. "I feel degraded, when I think of it. I have often wondered if something could not be done to her eyes—if she might not regain her sight. If would be terrible to sit night and day in outer darkness."

"Terrible indeed!" assented Nellie, so forcibly that he gazed at her in astonishment.

"You speak as if you knew all about it," he said.

"I do," she returned; "and no one pities the blind so much, or feels as keenly for them as I do."

"Well now, you know all about her," he said, as they came in sight of the town. "And no doubt you despise me as a heartless, mercenary wretch. But I am more to be pitied than you imagine. I have no sisters, no cousins, and, so to speak, no wife. I am, and have ever been, faithful to her in word and deed. I am far, ever out of from love and home—a real home—like other men. I seem to be drifting aimlessly about the world—dead. But I'm boring you, I know, talking so much about myself."

"Not at all," she said, eagerly. "I like it. And you have no womankind at all?"

"No, not one, and there is not a woman in the world—except, perhaps, one—who would care a brass button if I was dead to-morrow!"

"Who is that one?" she asked, quickly "your wife?"

"My wife!" with a short laugh. "No."

"Then who?" pertinaciously. "Since you have told me so much, tell me all," coaxingly.

"Since I have told you so much I will tell you no more. You would be too wise; you would," smiling, "be dangerous!"

"Well, listen to me, "Lord Ravenhill," she

said, after a silence, suddenly reining up her horse at the end of a lane just before they came into the town; "you offered me your friendship the other day;" and, putting out her pretty little gloved hand, "on second thoughts, I accept it, and here is my hand on the bar-gain."

Twenty minutes later she threw open the door of hers and Mary's joint-bedroom, exclaiming, "Guess whom I've been riding with all the afternoon?" tossing her hat and whip on her bed; "I give you six guesses, my dear."

"Your husband, of course!" promptly.

"Clever girl, but you must not call him that on any account."

"And had you a pleasant ride? But I need not ask."

"Yes, quite charming. He is a first-rate horseman, and I've come to the conclusion that—that I like him very much indeed—as a friend."

(To be continued.)

GETHER condemned the practice of congratulation upon marriage. "It is," he said, "as absurd as congratulating a man on having drawn a lottery ticket before you know whether it is a prize or a blank."

RE-ENGAGEMENTS FOR INDIA.—The number of re-engagements, under the new regulations, of soldiers for a further period of service in India, is up to the latest returns about 6,700. Of these 1,500 will in the ordinary course have returned to England this trooping season. The majority of those who have signed for re-engagements were due to leave India in 1884.

HIRE TO GIRLS.—Among the entertainments provided for your amusement this winter, a fancy dress ball is among the most enjoyable, although attended by some perplexity. It is really beyond the limit of human intelligence to decide on short notices whether the dress you may adopt will transform you into a beauty or will have the opposite effect, and bring horrible contortions to the countenances of your dearest friends through an attempt to conceal an irresistible desire to shout with laughter as they behold you in all your glory.

"Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat," is always a nice character for a decided blonde, with golden hair let loose over the shoulders, straight and flowing, with a golden fillet around the head. The trained robe of pale green satin is gold embroidered around the foot of the skirt, and a white satin trim is confined at the waist by a gold cord, knotted in front. Over this is a crimson velvet jacket embroidered with gold, the sleeves of which are open and flowing. Form brunetto, Faustina in "Lalla-Rich," is an excellent character. The first-mentioned character will, however, be most suited to one that is a tall, slender blonde. Sir Walter Scott's heroine, as a rule, better dressed than those portrayed by Dickens. One would hardly choose to go as Mrs. Trodgers when she could as well appear as Queen Elizabeth.

AMERICAN WOMEN.—In weddings, as in dress, fashion has her say, and a trifling say it is. Some years ago what was supposed to be the English style was introduced. The peculiarity of this style lies in the absence of bridesmaids, the presence of a best man, and the substitution of ushers for groomsmen. The best man follows the groom from the vestry and holds the groom's hat during the ceremony. But, after all, this does not seem to be the genuine English style. It is rather a sort of compromise for mild Anglo-maniacs, between the British and the American method. The true, through-and-through English style requires, beside a best man and ushers, that the bride shall walk up the aisle ungloved, holding the family prayer-book. As the Anglo-maniac is an imitation, an imitation prayer-book will probably do for those ladies whose families don't use a prayer-book. An innovation in wedding which has, however, nothing especial to do with the English or American style, is to strew the middle aisle of the church with autumn leaves. This picturesque feature was introduced at a recent wedding in New Jersey,

the rustling leaves accompanying the soft wedding music at the bridal party approached the aisle. It is now not uncommon to have young girls in Kate Greenaway costume to attend at the altar during the ceremony.—*American Paper.*

AS early as the time of Alexander II. of Scotland, a man who let weeds go to seed on a farm was declared to be the king's enemy. In Denmark farmers are compelled to destroy all weeds on their premises. In France a man may prosecute his neighbour for damages who permits weeds to go to seed which may endanger neighbouring lands.

AUTUMN PLANTS.—In Regent's Park nearly 50,000 healthy, well-rooted plants are given away each autumn to poor applicants. The walks and avenues of the park are lined with geraniums and similar flowers, and when the crisp autumn nights come the plants, which are needed by the government hot-houses, are potted and set aside, and the rest, always a very large number, are given away. These plants might be left for a few days longer to gladden the eyes of the passers, but the aggregate of enjoyment is much increased by preserving them in season and giving them life for the long winter months.

IN several places in India, recently, the sun appeared to have a distinctly green colour during a period of some days. This singular phenomenon, which has caused much interest and even alarm, has been attributed by the government astronomers to the passage across Southern India of sulphurous vapour from the Java volcanoes.

RESCUE A SUICIDE seems rather a thankless task in Germany. A waiter in one of the hotels at the well-known picturesque spot of Rolandseck, on the Rhine, recently hanged himself, but was cut down in time by one of the guests. Now the ungrateful waiter is suing his preserver for undue interference, and for damages sustained by the unauthorised cutting of the rope—which happened to be a new one.

AN interesting Soldiers' Industrial Exhibition has been opened at Lucknow, the ninth of its kind. The exhibits are very varied and numerous, ranging from machinery, carpentry, metal and leather work to printing, painting, and photography, while needlework is contributed by the soldiers' wives and children. The native corps are particularly encouraged to exhibit, and their contributions are very good.

CURE FOR COBRASTUS.—The annexed bill of fare is that proposed by Professor Ebbstein for an average case of cobrastry, the invalid being supposed to be forty-one years of age, and having suffered from increasing stoniness for twenty-five years. The disease is supposed to be contracted by insufficient bodily exercise, a diet consisting of such things as are hurtful, among which are named all sweet dishes, and those containing much albumen, and those devoid of a sufficient quantity of fat. Breakfast—A large cup of black tea without milk or sugar; fifty grammes of white bread, or toasted brown bread, with plenty of butter. Dinner—Soup (frequently, and with bone marrow); one hundred and twenty, to one hundred and eighty grammes of meat, boiled or roasted, with fat gravy—fat meat being preferable; a small quantity of vegetables, particularly luminous, but also all kinds of cabbage. Turnips are excluded because of the sugar contained in them; potatoes are altogether excluded. After dinner some fresh fruit, when in season; as dessert, a salad or baked fruit without sugar. Soon after dinner a large cup of black tea, without milk or sugar. Supper—In winter regularly, in summer occasionally, a large cup of black tea without milk and sugar. An egg or some fat roast meat, or both; sometimes fat ham; smoked or fresh fish, about thirty grammes of white bread, with plenty of butter; and occasionally a small quantity of cheese and some fresh fruit.

TWO LITTLE MAIDS.

—o—

I know two little maidens,
And they are like the flowers
That lead a glory to this dull
Autumnal world of ours!
And one has stolen from her locks
The gloss of ripened sheaves;
And one—her tawny hair is like
The brown November leaves!

Bernice is blond and debonair—
So pale, she can but choose
To clothe her lily whiteness in
The soft indefinite hues
That tint the inmost petals of
The last belated rose—
Or flush with faintest pink and pearl
The dawn's unruled snows!

Her looks are like the ashen gold
That on the bracken lies;
The wistful gentians look at me
With her beseeching eyes—
Such darkly fringed, unfathomed spheres
Of deep, pell-mell blue,
We can but guess what mysteries
Of heaven are shining through!

Olivia! silvery syllabled,
My thoughts to music run.
But to repeat her name—my dark
Haired daughter of the sun!
Her splendid briony beauty, clad
In rich and quaint attire;
The lurid crimson of her lip,
Her glance of dusky fire!

She minds me of the marigolds,
That kindled such a glow
Beneath the sunny garden wall,
At Beech-Croft long ago!
I hear the drone of the bees,
The woodbine's drowsy stir!
I smell the musk of purple grapes,
Only to look at her!

And which of these is fairest,
And whom I love the best,
Not to the little maid, so like
The flowers, have I confessed;
For while in sweet contentment
They bloom beside my hearth,
My daughters make of home, to me,
The garden place of earth!

E. A. B.

BY ANNE BROWN.

OVERLETTED.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

CHAPTER I.

"Rosalind, my dear!"
"Yes, grannie!"
"Do you know that you were whistling?"
"Was it I am a mass of dignity, I know,
but when my hands are full, my brains are very
apt to go wool-gathering. Where do you think
I was just then, grannie, dear?"

"I haven't the least idea; not in your own
drawing-room, I should imagine!"

And Lady St. Quentin shook her head and tried to look a reproof at the lovely girl, who was sitting at a table a little way off surrounded by a perfect chaos of work of all sorts. Garments of all sizes, and in all stages of completion, lay about her, and her white fingers were moving quickly to the music of her own voice. She looked up with a merry smile as her grandmother addressed her, and showed a pair of splendid eyes, and a face that betokened great intellect, and much strength of will into the bargain.

She was not strictly beautiful; this youthful mistress of the lordly domain of Barron's Court, but without absolute beauty of feature. Everybody spoke of Rosalind St. Quentin as "lovely." She was lovely! It was the word that fitted her better than any other. There was a

winning charm about her, and a lithe grace in her every movement, that made all men rave about her, and all women—even the most envious—admire her. Hers was the sort of witchery that, in olden times, made men go contented to their death, satisfied with a word or a look from the woman who had fascinated them. And perhaps the greatest charm of all in her sweet nature was the utter absence of anything like consciousness of her power.

Even her grandmother, Lady St. Quentin—a courtly dame of the old school, who was horrified at the strides of modern times, and the latitude allowed to young ladies now that the world had turned round once more—was conquered by Rosalind's open, generous nature, and forgot to say very often that she was shocked, or astonished, or grieved at her granddaughter's very unorthodox proceedings. Rosalind was of age. With culpable carelessness, Lady St. Quentin thought her father had given her the property at eighteen; declaring, during his last illness, that his little girl had more brains in her head than many a man of fifty; and almost quarrelled with his mother-in-law—whom he respected and revered as if she had been his own—because she suggested that it would be putting too much on such young shoulders to leave Barron's Court and its revenues unconditionally to her grandchild.

It had not been too much, apparently. Rosalind Ormsby was no commonplace girl; she had elected to live on at her old home when her father died—though her grandmother suggested that she should let it and reside with her in London; and she had taken a certain Miss Vereker, a distant cousin of her father, to live with her and be her companion and adviser.

Not that Barbara Vereker could have given anyone much advice if it had been wanted; she was one of the meekest and mildest of created beings. A little colorless old woman, never daring to have an opinion of her own about anything; and, though very undemonstrative, sincerely grateful for the home thus providentially provided for her. She had been a help and comfort to Rosalind's mother during her last illness, and Mr. Ormsby, recognizing her quiet merit, had asked her to stay with his orphan girl when she was left alone.

Lady St. Quentin had been inclined to resent the introduction of this elderly spinster into the Barron's Court household; but she had come to understand Miss Vereker's worth, and to appreciate her as her granddaughter did. She appealed to her now, as she sat in her corner busied with some interminable knitting—apparently of the same class as the frocks and tippets that surrounded the young heiress. "Don't you think it is a dreadful habit of Rosalie, Miss Vereker?"

"I am afraid that would be to confirm it," she said, gently, with a smile at the bright young face that was turned to them both. "I only hope Rosalie will never do it anywhere where it cannot be apologized or accounted for."

"In church, for instance," Miss Ormsby said, with a mischievous look, "it would have a novel and exhilarating effect. We should never come to the sermon, I am afraid; and the children, who stand in such awe of me now, would laugh for the rest of their natural lives. Ah, don't look cross, grannie dear. I wasn't here at all when I whistled just now, I was in the ten-acre field with that confounded boy of Betty Higgins. He's just the best whistler and the cleverest insect catcher I ever saw. He's fit for nothing else; but he can take a butterfly and never damage feather of its down."

"The ten-acre field! My dear child, you talk just like a farmer! What do you know about fields?"

"Not nearly as much as I ought to," the girl replied. "A farmer! I am a farmer. I am going to farm all the house-land, with that handsome Mr. Armitage for my prime minister."

"My dear, do be careful what you say," Lady St. Quentin said, trying with all her might to look as if she were not horrified at

her grandchild's words. "Young ladies don't farm. And do put some of these horrid things away. Here's Rupert coming, I do believe; and don't whistle while he is here. Men have such a horror of anything unfeminine!"

"I'll be on my very best behaviour," the girl replied. "I'll put away my work—because I have done it; and I won't whistle the tiniest little bar." And as if to show that she meant to keep her word, she broke out into a song. The sweetest, blitheest voice in the world had Rosalind Ormsby. Her mother had had the Heaven-sent gift before her, and it had come down to her child.

"Love me little, love me long,
Is the burden of my song;
Love that is too hot and strong,
Burns soon to waste."

"What a horrible, cold-hearted idea! Rosalie!" and a young man dashed in through the open window as he spoke, startling the three ladies out of their quiet talk. "How can love be too hot?"

"I'm not responsible for the author's ideas; the air is pretty, and papa used to like it."

Sue looked up into his face with her pretty eyes as she spoke; and he bent his head and kissed her. They were going to be married some day, so there was no impropriety in the caress; and Rosalind could hardly analyze the feelings that made her blush rosy-red at the touch of his lips, and wished that he had not done it. He had kissed her often before; and she loved him very much of course. He was the husband of her own choice; she had said yes to him of her own free will, but very much to her grandmother's delight, who would have schemed to bring the marriage about somehow if the young people had not settled it for themselves. Rupert was too handsome to do without money; she had been won't to say, and except for what she managed to give him out of her jointure, Rupert St. Quentin—now by his father's death Lord St. Quentin—was very poor indeed.

He had his title now, but it was almost an empty honour. He was as poor as a man could well be, and, urged by his grandmother, and prompted by honest admiration for Rosalind as well, he had proposed to his cousin and been accepted. The marriage was not to be just yet—that was understood. Rosalind wanted her freedom a little longer; she had divers plans of her own that she wanted to carry out at Barron's Court before she gave up the reins of government to her husband. She was not afraid of very much opposition from Rupert, but she knew that he held some other ideas about the improvement of poor people's houses, and matters of that sort, as Quixotic and extravagant, and she did not want them interfered with.

"You are always up to your eyebrows in drapery of some sort," he said, poking at a pile of little garments with his cane. "Why, what in the name of all that's ugly is this thing?"

"Don't be rude, sir; put it down!" Rosalind said, laughing, and blushing again. "It's a petticoat for the baby at the Lodge. I was just putting it all away. It's just about done. There's going to be a distribution of it on Monday. You must come and help me."

"Come and hand petticoats to old women? No, thank you," the young man said. "I am afraid I have an appointment for Monday. Can't you get the curate?"

"Certainly, we can get the curate," Rosalind said; "he will have to come if we want him. But that won't be like having you there. You need not touch an article if you don't like, nor come near an old woman; but they would feel honoured, poor things, by a look from you—their future master, Rupert!"

"Yes, of course. It is very nice of them and all that," said the young man, confidentially; "but, you see, I have an engagement, you know I have, and I wanted you to come with me; but I suppose the old women and the petticoats will be of more importance."

"Well, yes," Miss Ormsby said, gravely. "They will. Don't you see, Rupert, it is a

treat to them. It has been promised for a long time, and the day fixed. They cannot take any day for amusement as you and I can."

"If you please, miss, Mr. Armytage is in the library. He says you appointed to see him there at one o'clock."

"So I did," said Rosalind, rising hastily. "It's about those cottages down by the mill-pond. We have quite decided to rebuild them, and Mr. Armytage has brought the plans, I expect. Come with me, Rupert, and see them. Perhaps you can suggest something that we have not thought of."

"Thanks, no, I'd rather not," the young man said, indolently—Rupert St. Quentin was nothing if not indolent—and stroking his soft, brown moustache. "I've no head for plans, and all that sort of thing. I should only make a muddle of any suggestions I might make. I should lead the builders to putting the cellars in the roofs and the drawing-room underground, or something equally horrible. Excuse me, there's a dear, Rosie, and make haste back."

"There are not to be any cellars," Rosalind said; "and there are not likely to be drawing-rooms in cottages. Don't be lazy, sir! I am ashamed of you!"

"I'm awfully sorry," Rupert St. Quentin said, going up to the piano and running his white fingers over the keys. He was proud of his essentially feminine hand, and liked to show it off in the undulating movement of the keys of a piano in a desultory fashion. He was not altogether an off-mate man, but there was very little about him of the manly brusquerie that generally fascinates girls; and most people wondered how Rosalind, with her bright intellect and frank, unaffected warm-heartedness, could have chosen one so entirely her opposite in every respect.

He annoyed her sometimes by his want of sympathy in her plans and the work she loved so well. He did not seem to care for Barrows Court at all, she thought, and there was the least suspicion of asperity in her tone as she answered him now.

"Don't blame me if the cottages are not to your liking when they are done," she said; "nor Mr. Armytage either. Remember, we would have taken you into our counsel, and you would not come."

"I am sure I shall not blame you," Rupert answered, still letting his fingers wander idly over the keys, and admiring the gleam of a favorite ring he was wearing. "You are mistress, dear, and do as you like; Armytage is only your servant. I should never think of him in the matter. Come back soon, Rosie; I have a new song for you."

"I shall finish my business first," Miss Ormsby said, and left the room with somewhat what Miss Vereker was apt to call "a snap"—the nearest approach to temper she ever showed.

"Rupert, you are a fool!"

These words came so suddenly from Lady St. Quentin's lips that her grandson stopped his lazy performance, and twisted himself round on the music stool to look at her.

"Is that a new discovery, grannie?" he asked.

"No!"

"Then why air your opinion just at this moment?"

"Because you provoke me to it—because I can see that every day of your life you are alienating Rosalind's heart from you. You take no interest in her pursuits."

"Not in old women and their flannel petticoats. You are right there, grannie!"

"Don't be coarse, sir; nor in anything else. You ought to interest yourself in her plans and charities, and—"

"Oh, spare me the list of my enormities. I can't do it, grannie. Rosie has brains for both of us in that pretty head of hers. She does not really want me; and I was never intended by nature for either an architect or a surveyor. I shall be quite content to be prince-consort."

"I am ashamed to hear you say so. Rosie won't love you any the better for such idleness and folly."

"Why should I be anything else? The people believe in her, and she will make the boldest queen that ever ruled. She has a prime minister, and—"

"And you are content to let the world go by you, while you dawdle through it, looking at yourself in the glass, and letting your future wife spend her mornings with her steward and her evenings working, like a whole dormitory rolled into one, at gowns and petticoats for her poor. Why, even the labourers on the place make a laughing-stock of you, and prophecy that Rosie will be mistress and master too when you are married. Why, they would rather have Norman Armytage for a master than you. He has some manliness and good sense in him."

Lady St. Quentin loved her grandson very dearly, though she deplored his faults, and strove with all her might to amend them. Her son, Rupert's father, had been a source of trouble to her all his life. Early left fatherless, he had worn out his mother's patience and her purse in college days, and had only retrieved himself on the very brink of ruin by marrying a wealthy manufacturer's daughter, whose money only helped him to fresh extravagances.

For many years of his life he had been a broken-down invalid, soured and miserable, and when his wife died he had summoned his mother to live with him, and take care of him and his son. She had done so faithfully and well till he died, and was laid beside his wife in the family vault. There was nothing left for his son; the estates were mortgaged, and the house was let; and but for Lady St. Quentin's generosity her grandson, with an old title and an unbroken descent from the Norman marauders, would have been an absolute pauper.

CHAPTER II.

NORMAN ARMYTAGE sat in the library at Barrows Court, waiting for the young mistress of the mansion, and thinking, as he looked out of the window on to as fair a prospect as any in all England. The steward, Lady St. Quentin had called him, but there was nothing of the servant or dependant in the handsome young face that was turned to the waving tree and glowing flowers outside. It was a truly patrician face, and the whole bearing and manner of the man were those of a gentleman.

His father was the steward. Stanley Armytage had been steward of the Barrows Court property for more years than his son could remember. He was born to no better station. He came of a long line of sturdy yeomen who had served and prospered in their service, and farmed and lived honourable and useful lives without dreaming of soaring above their station in any way. But the mother of Norman Armytage was of a different stamp—the daughter of an impudent gentleman with the blood of the Howards in her veins, and all the pride of race that is apt to go with long descent. She had preferred comfort and independence, with a good-natured and warm-hearted husband, to semi-starvation and the coldly-given charity of her father's aristocratic relatives.

She was an outcast and an alien from the time of her marriage—a creature to be spoken of only with abhorring horror and uplifted hands—but she managed to live a very happy life, and to die regretted, as only loving wives and mothers are regretted, by her husband and her only child. It was from her that the boy inherited all his innate refinement. He was like her in person and character; and he had all his father's good qualities as well. He was open, honest, and truthful; he scorned a lie, and was fearless and outspoken, and he was as handsome as he was good. His father idolized him and resolved to make him something more than he had been himself.

In his heart he resolved that his son should

be a gentleman, and show his haughty relations what a steward's son could be made. He knew nothing of them, he held no communication with his wife's kindred, beyond letting the man know when she died, he took no notice of them, and Norman grew up almost in ignorance of their existence.

He was sent to a good school, and the elder Mr. Armytage would have supplemented the good begun there by sending him to college as well; but the lad himself, with great good sense, as every one thought that knew the circumstances, negotiated the proposal, and begged to be allowed to begin at once to earn his own living. He shrank a little, though he did not tell his father as much, from the thought of mixing on unequal terms with the sons of gentlemen, and he had already, boy as he was, mapped out for himself a career that he was ambitious to follow; so, instead of going to Oxford, he went into the office of a London firm of accountants, and made a start in life which promised very fairly, for he was industrious and painstaking, and speedily won the approval and goodwill of his employers. But—

"The best-laid schemes o' mice and men,
Gang aft a-gley,"

as Burns has it, and Norman Armytage had his scheme of life scattered to the winds by the sudden illness of his father. A paralytic seizure prostrated Mr. Armytage senior only a month or two after the death of Mr. Ormsby, and Norman was sent for to fill his place.

"Only till I am better, my boy," the old man had said, when he begged his son to stay. But that day had never come; he had remained in the same helpless state, clear enough mentally, but physically prostrate, and Norman had stayed on and done the work for him as cleverly as he would have done it himself. It had gone against the grain, especially when he found that the sole right to order and administer was vested in a young girl hardly out of her teens; but he had been astonished at her clear-headedness and the bright fashion in which she grasped every detail of the management of the estate, and he had come to work with and for her with a will, and to enter with all his heart into her schemes for the improvement of her people's position and the well-being of everyone about her.

He was in a dreamy mood this morning, the plans for the cottages lay under his hand, and he was thinking. The position had been fraught with danger for him and the peril had come; the sweet fascination of Rosalind Ormsby's nature had conquered him, and his heart was in her keeping to do with it what she would have done but known it. He had fought with the fascination, battled with it as honest men will battle with anything that is not right, but it had been too strong for him. He was fighting with it now as he waited for her in the old library, almost cursing the day that had brought him within the reach of her witchery.

"Fool that I am!" he said to himself. "Blind, idiotic fool! I that thought myself so brave and cold-blooded when first I saw her golden head bending over musty papers, and despised her for what I thought an affected interest in matters for which ladies generally care nothing. And now—ah, my darling! my darling! I would lay down my life for one hour of happiness and love with you, for one word of love from your sweet lips."

He crushed the papers he held in his hand with a nervous grip, and paced the room for a minute like a caged animal.

"I must give it up," he muttered; "I cannot stand the strain. I shall forget myself, and some day, when she looks up into my face with her sweet unconscious eyes and asks me a question, I shall throw my manhood and my honour to the winds, and claim her for my own in madness and misery unutterable! I ought never to have come here. I should have helped the old man in some other way; he told me that her future husband would be here a great deal, and that he would assist in all the business of the estate. Did he know, I wonder,

what an idiot is to reign here at Barrons Court—what a mass of conceit and self-importance is to lord it over his master's daughter, and spend the revenues of the old place as his father before him spent everything he could lay his hands on? And if that were all, if there were nothing else—if that bejewelled ape she has chosen for her husband were only an honourable man. If I were to tell her what I know—if—have a care, Norman Armytage, don't let the walls hear what you suspect, what you know, things will right themselves maybe; but it must not be by your handiwork. Remember you are only the steward—the servant waiting your mistress's pleasure. Who is it that says that 'Love levels all ranks'? He lied; there can be no levelling to bring me nearer her!"

"Rehearsing a charade, Mr. Armytage?"

He started guiltily; he had not heard the door open, nor Rosalind's light footstep enter the room. How much had she heard? How much had he spoken aloud? How many of us would give something to have that question solved when we are caught self-communing? He need not have been afraid. Rosalind had heard nothing except a few muttered words, and she was amused at the look of perplexed horror in his face at being discovered talking to himself. She little guessed what had been the subject of that solitary talk!

"I beg your pardon," he said, recovering himself at once, and placing a chair for her to sit at the table. "I am afraid I have a habit of talking to myself. I have lived a good deal alone in town, and the trick has grown upon me. I hope I did not ask you to come to me at an inconvenient time? Haverd wants these plans as soon as possible, and I think it would be expedient to let him have them, or we may have to wait for some time before the work is done, and I don't think we could get a better man."

He had recovered his scattered wits during his speech, and faced her now as calm and self-possessed as if he had never indulged in a wild day-dream in his life.

"It is I who have to beg your pardon, Mr. Armytage," Rosalind said, with a slight bend of her head, and a smile that very nearly sent him off into a trance again. "I kept you waiting."

"Hardly a moment."

"Oh, yes, I did; and your time is precious. But I had to put my work away; and then Rupert—that is, Lord St. Quentin—came in, and I was trying to persuade him to come with me and see about the cottages; and it ended in my coming in a hurry, after all. I found it rather waste of breath."

"Lord St. Quentin dislikes the dry details of business, I find," Norman Armytage said, quietly.

"He dislikes business in every way," Rosalind replied, hastily; and then feeling that perhaps she was seeming to put her betrothed husband at a disadvantage by her words, she added, hurriedly, "He and I were brought up so differently, you know. His father never paid any attention to such things. Mine did."

"And the result is evident," the young man said. "You have Barrons Court, and—"

"And my cousin has nothing, of course. That is only carrying out the words of the commandment, and making the children suffer for the sins of their fathers. My cousin is not to blame. The estate was mortgaged before he was born, and he has not been fairly dealt with since. I wonder if you can help me to set it right."

"I would help you to anything in the world that I could, Miss Ormsby."

She looked up hastily at the words. There was something in their tone that startled her; but Norman Armytage had recollected himself just in time, and was looking at her with a calm, business-like face that put her suspicious to the blush.

"I must be an idiot," she said to herself. "He only made me an ordinary answer, and yet—Rosalind Ormsby, you are a fool, only fit for a lunatic asylum."

She gave herself a little shake mentally, and

answered him as quietly as if she had not seen or suspected anything.

"Thank you. I hardly know what I want, nor how to set about it. I can talk to the lawyers, of course; but I should like to have an idea what I was going to say to them before I did so. You see, papa—perhaps I ought to speak of it; my grandmother always manages to set me down when I begin on the subject, but I feel that I am *right* about it, and—"

"Whatever you say shall be sacred with me, Miss Ormsby. If I can help you in anything I will be sure of it."

No passion in the voice now—no sign of excitement in the quiet, earnest eyes that met hers so gravely. Norman Armytage was the self-possessed man of business now, and one could talk to him.

"I want to help my cousin," she said; "I'll come to the plans in a minute, Mr. Armytage, but this is uppermost this minute. I don't quite know what made it so, but it is. Rupert has been badly treated. He never says so; but I think so, and so must he. Papa always meant to leave him something handsome, and he must have forgotten it; for when his will was read there was only a little tiny legacy, and poor Rupert was no better off than he was before. He has never said anything. He is too generous for that; but I know he felt it very much. I want to set it right for him."

"You mean you want to endow Lord St. Quentin with a fortune?"

"Yes, I suppose that's it really. I want him to have some money, and not to know anything. I don't want to appear in it. Can't it be managed some way? Couldn't a document be found somewhere, giving it to him, and all that sort of thing?"

"I am afraid that sort of thing is only practised in novels," Norman Armytage said, with a smile. "Your lawyers are the only persons who can help you in such a matter; unless you put the money you wish to give your cousin into his hands in hand cash, and make a free gift of it that way, you must invoke the aid of the lawyers."

"I couldn't do it that way," Rosalind said, with a little laugh. "He wouldn't take it. I am afraid I ought not to have spoken to you about it, Mr. Armytage; but I am very friendless in matters of that sort. I have really no gentleman friend that I can go to with my troubles, except Rupert himself; and I could not very well go to him and ask him how best I could give him some money without offending him."

"Well, no, I don't see how you could," Norman Armytage said, longing to be able to tell her how he wished he could be her friend, and do for her all she wanted in this as in all other things. "And to think how unworthy he is of it all," he thought, as Rosalind turned again to the plans and the cottages, and busied herself with them. Pearls before swine! was there ever comparison more apt? The precious pearl of her priceless love thrown away on a man who—bah! I must not think of it, I must not speak of it even to myself."

He gave his attention to the papers on the table, and in a very little while they had settled the business between them. The cottages were to be proceeded with at once, and Rosalind went back to her grandmother and Miss Vereker with a promise to see Mr. Armytage again the next day.

"Rupert is gone out," Lady St. Quentin said, with some dissatisfaction in her tone, as her granddaughter entered the room. "He said you would probably be a long time over the plans, and he would not wait. I must say that he behaves in a careless fashion that would not have suited me when I was a young woman. You will have to take him in hand, and scold him well presently."

"He will come to his senses without any scolding, I hope," Rosalind replied, but she was very grave for a little.

His grandmother was right, Rupert was careless, and did not pay her the attention that was due to her as mistress of Barrons

Court, to say nothing of the lover like nothing that were her due as his affianced wife.

CHAPTER III.

Rosalind sighed when she was out of her grandmother's sight, and wished that Rupert was a little more like other men—like Norman Armytage, was on her lips to say—but she crushed the traitorous thought before she allowed herself to put it into words. She would not see quite so much of her steward, as she called the young man, in the future. It was not well to contrast him so constantly with Rupert. Rupert was a dear, good fellow, and she had been wrong to speak and think of him as she had done; but, oh! if he would only take a little more interest in her farms and her cottages, and show himself a worthy master of the old place.

Things will right themselves by-and-by, she thought, and then she fell into a happy dream over her dressing—about the time, not so very long ago, when her cousin asked her to be his wife, and said such gentle, loving words to her as had almost made her forget her grief for her father's loss in the anticipation of the happiness in store for her as his wife. He had no habitation of his own, this impeccable Rupert; he lived in chambers in London, or at his grandmother's Dowr House, which was only a few miles from Barrons Court. And now that she was here, staying for an indefinite time with Rosalind, he was free of the place, and might have made acquaintance with all the people in it if he had so willed. He was looked upon as the future lord, but the cottagers shook their heads with the quick discrimination of the poor, and opined that the London dandy was a "poor creature," and not half good enough for their young lady. Rosalind was heart whole when he proposed to marry her, or rather her money. It mattered very little to him what manner of woman he took with it so that he came into possession of it; and he looked upon the revenues of Barrons Court almost as his right. He had expected his uncle to leave him a competence at least, and he had been put off with a paltry five hundred pounds.

He was thinking somewhat bitterly of this on this very morning as he walked briskly towards the village post-office with some letters he had been carrying about in his pocket, and suddenly remembered. Hence his departure from the room before Rosalind came back. His tailor was dunning him, and he had already had the money from his grandmother to settle that very account; and there were one or two other little bills that he did not want her to know of, all of which had to be attended to, or they would have come to light. It was a hard thing, he thought, that he should have to content himself with such a paltry pittance, and haggle with his tradesman, and beg for time to pay, when Rosalind, with not half the capacity for spending money, or enjoying it either, had more than she knew what to do with.

"Poor Rosie!" he muttered to himself, as he walked back after seeing his letters safely into the box. "She is a nice girl, and a pretty creature, too, but not like you, my darling, not like you!"

He took a little case from his breast-pocket, and opened it. He was walking through a thick plantation where he was not likely to be seen or heard, and he gazed rapturously at the face that met his eyes when he opened the morocco cover. It was not the face of his cousin, but of a woman in the very prime and fulness of her beauty—dark-browed and brown-eyed, and with rich full lips that seemed to challenge a caress in their speaking witchery.

"My own Violet!" the young man said. "My poor love! How will it all end? There will never be any other woman in the world for me if I were ten times master of Barrons Court. How shall I tell you, my darling? How shall I say that we must part, my Violet

"It must be, and yet—need you ever know, my darling? There will be money enough, and—"

He stopped short with a cry of startled delight, a delight that was half fear.

There was a rustle in the bushes beside him, and the original of the portrait stepped out into the path before him. "The embodiment of a poet's dream," someone had called Violet Mansergh, when her lovely face was served for the model of a sketch that had formed part of an artist's great picture; and just such a lovely vision she looked now with the sunlight streaming down upon her, and every feature beaming with delight and happiness.

"Violet!"

It was all he could say in his surprise and delight, and she nestled into the arms he held out to her as if she had found her proper place. It was her place, for had he not asked her to be his wife?—told her he loved her above all earthly things, and spoken of the time when they would be together, with nothing in the world to come between them? He was not Lord St. Quentin to her. She knew him only as plain Mr. St. Clair, a customer at the shop where she had been cashier.

She was no commonplace, vulgar girl. Her father was a retired army captain, but with nothing but his half-pay to live on, and his daughter was glad to earn what she could in an honest fashion to help towards their modest housekeeping.

She had gone her own quiet way, escaping the perils to which her beauty and grace constantly exposed her, till she met Rupert St. Quentin, and she had given her heart unreservedly to him, without a thought that he was anything more than the simple gentleman he represented himself to be.

But that was far away in London, and he had no more idea of meeting her here than he had of how she should tell her how inconstant and deceitful he had been to her. She was beside him now, and he forgot everything but her marvellous beauty and his unconquerable love.

"My darling!" he said, pressing her again and again to his heart, and kissing her sweet lips, "how came you here?"

"Where have you been that I could not tell you?" she replied, answering his question with another. "We have come to live at Norchester, papa and I."

"Norchester?"

"Yes."

"What to do there?"

"Papa has got an appointment there. What makes you look so Rupert? what difference will it make to us?"

"None, of course, that is—"

"That is what? do you live near here?"

"No, I am only on a visit. I live in London, as you know. Tell me all about yourself, where you live in Norchester, and where I can see you."

"Where you can see me! Come and see me, of course!"

"I am not sure that I can—there are reasons. I will explain everything to you soon. I must get away now. Oh, Violet, I cannot tell you what it is to have seen you! It is like water in a desert to a thirsty man! What are you doing in these woods if you live at Norchester? It is three miles away."

"Yes, I know, but papa had some business at a farmhouse here. I am going to meet him now. We came over together, and I waited about while I waited for him. I am so glad I did not stay at the inn where he put the horse. I should have missed you then. What a lovely country this is, Rupert! I have met one old acquaintance here already."

"Indeed, who?"

"A Mr. Armytage. He used to have rooms close to where we lived in London. I used to fancy he must know you when you came to see me. I saw him stare at you once or twice as if he did. I met him not half-an-hour ago."

"And spoke to him?"

"No; I don't think he knew me again, or if he did he was thinking of something else. He did not seem to see me. Don't look so con-

cerned about it, I have really no acquaintance with him."

She thought he was jealous. She had no idea what a tempest of conflicting feeling was whirling in his heart.

"Confound him!" was his thought, as he heard Norman Armytage's name. "He is always in the way, that fellow. He will make mischief. I must manage to keep Violet out of his way."

What could have possessed them to come to Norchester? he asked himself. Was there no other town in all England they could have chosen? Rosalind went to Norchester sometimes, so did his grandmother. And if there was anything to be found out, that exemplary old lady would be sure to get it. He cursed his fate and his position, and told himself that there was never a man so beset since the world began; on the one side, Rosalind and her fortune, and the position that a marriage with her would give him; on the other, Violet and her glorious beauty, and the love that would make their lives one long foretaste of Paradise! Could he not have them both? The evil thought had entered his head more than once since he had affianced himself to his cousin. Other men led two lives, and the wronged women were none the worse while their ignorance lasted. Ah! there was the rub! While it did—but would it last? Did there not always come an end to it, and dire retribution fall on all the offenders?

He was not wicked, as many thousands of his countrymen, this idle scion of an idle race—he was simply a man who had let himself drift into a great difficulty, and could see no way out of it. If he could only keep the two apart—if Violet could be kept in ignorance of Rosalind and Barrons Court, and Norchester became as opposite ends of the earth, all might yet be well. He took Violet in his arms once more—there was no one near them but the rabbits and the wild birds—and talked to her. She must not come there any more. She must keep out of the way of being seen by any one in that neighbourhood. He would come to her, but not at her father's. He did not want any one to know he was there for the present. He was about some business, which would result in money—money for them both, if she would be good and patient, and above all things, trusting, whatever she might see or hear.

And while he was whispering his admonitions and clasping the lithe form of the beautiful girl closer and closer to his heart, Norman Armytage was coming upon them from the other side of the wood, as unconscious as they were of the coming *contretemps*.

"Trust you!" Violet said, as their eyes met and told each other of the oft-repeated story of their love. "Nothing can shake my faith in you, Rupert!"

Their lips met in a clinging kiss, and Norman Armytage looking through the trees saw and understood all.

"The scoundrel!" he muttered between his set teeth—"the cowardly scoundrel! That girl is no light o' love that a man may play with and cast aside; he is in earnest, and she believes him. What shall I do? She ought to know—my darling, who is to be sacrificed for to this mean hound? Shall I tell her? If I do will she not guess that I have some motive?—will she not suspect that I am trying to slander the man who would be my rival, if I dared to declare my passion for her? I cannot speak—I cannot bear to be silent. I must give it up, and get away. Barrons Court is no place for me. Good afternoon, Lord St. Quentin!"

The pair had separated, and Violet had walked swiftly away in the direction of the entrance to the plantation, where she had left her father; Rupert St. Quentin turning and retracing his steps, as if to walk back to the town.

"Oh! Good day!" he said, shortly.

"Where you sent to follow me, may I ask?"

"No; but I was charged with a message for you."

"From whom?"

"Lady St. Quentin. Her ladyship bade me say, if I met you, that they were waiting for you to drive with them to the Highlands farm. Jennings has sent down about the house you were looking at."

"Oh, thanks, I will get back quickly," said the young man, looking Norman Armytage full in the face, with an inquiring eye. "Any other message?"

"None, my lord."

"He didn't see anything!" Rupert St. Quentin said to himself, as he walked away leaving the other looking after him with a pained expression in his face. "What a mercy he didn't come upon the scene a minute or two sooner! Violet was out of sight before he saw me. Ware Hawk! my stay at Barrons Court would come to a speedy end, if that sneaking fellow got hold of such a bit of subject for scandal as my pretty Violet! I'll go back and do duty, and throw him off the scent if he fancies anything. I must stare my fate in the face, as I heard an idiotic comic singer say one day. I think I could be a match for Norman Armytage if I was put to it. It would be my word against his, if he made any mischief; and I think I know which Rosie would take."

CHAPTER IV.

The summer days passed by, and Rosalind's distribution of clothing to her old people and children was made with much care, and many a blessing from aged lips showered down on the fair young head that shone like a sunbeam amongst the old-fashioned hoods and quaint straw bonnets of her protégés.

Rupert was not there. He had kept his appointment, whatever it was, and absented himself from Barrons Court till the small of the tea and bread-and-butter had gone off, he told his grandmother, who was really very angry with him for what she considered his neglect.

"You set too great a value on yourself!" she said. "You cannot expect a warm-hearted girl like Rosie to put up with it! Girls expect more from a man than to be allowed to admire him at a distance!"

"Rosie will have enough of me by-and-by," the young man replied, somewhat shortly; "and for the present she is quite satisfied, I think. She has her Dorcas business and her schemes, and—"

"And Norman Armytage!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say—nothing else! Rosalind has Norman Armytage to anticipate every wish of hers before she speaks it almost. Have a care, or she will learn to contrast him with you, and it won't be to your favour!"

"Rosalind is a lady," Rupert St. Quentin said, with some scorn; "and she will never forget that fact. I have no fear of her falling in love with her servant—and that is what you seem to imply she is doing, grannie. She would never forget herself so far!"

"Norman Armytage is not her servant; he is merely here filling his father's place. I do not for a moment accuse Rosie of what you so coarsely call falling in love with him, but she has him beside her when it should be you, but for your all-absorbing idleness and self-conceit!"

"You are complimentary upon my word, grannie!" the young man said, with a grimace.

"It is the truth, and you know it!" the old lady replied, pitilessly. "And with a girl of Rosalind's temperament the aimless, idle life you lead is sure to weary and disgust her in the end. She is quixotic and generous, and the very sympathy you show towards all plans and arrangements only spurs her on to fresh schemes. Why can't you interest yourself in what she does a little? You will have to do it when you are master here!"

"I will wait till I am master, and then we shall see," Lord St. Quentin said. "Nothing you can say, or Rosie either, will ever make a farmer or an architect (that's the last crass, isn't it?) of me. As for the steward fellow, if

I thought there was the least shadow of a cause for the remark you made just now, I'd break his neck with as little compunction as I would drown a blind puppy!"

"Well, well, on your own head be it. I have warned you. Rosalind is her own mistress, and a warm-hearted, impulsive girl, and you are not going the right way to make her happy!"

"Rosalie and I understand each other very well," was the apparently carefree reply; and Lord St. Quentin walked away to ride over to Northcote and meet Violet Mansher at a place they had agreed upon, and to whisper soft nothings into her willing ear with a warmth that would have astonished Rosalind Ormsby very much indeed if he had shown the one half of it to her.

There was a shadow on Rosalind's life just now—a dreadful misgiving, born of a gradual awakening to the fact that what she had promised her cousin, and what she felt for him, was not the love that a girl should feel for the man to whom her whole future life is to be devoted. She fought with herself, and tried to struggle with the knowledge; but it was there, and would not be stamped out.

Whenever she tried to think of her cousin, and all the good qualities with which nature had endowed him, there would rise in her mind the image of the man whom Lord St. Quentin had so slightly called her servant, and she would do exactly what her grandmother had prophesied. She would contrast the low, earnest tones, and speaking, dark eyes of the one with the flippant speech and soft-satisfied demeanour of the other.

She thought herself very wicked, and when her grandmother, noticing that she was not well, and was languid and listless, and often looked as if she had been crying, proposed that she should go to town for the winter season, or at least part of it, she gladly acquiesced in the arrangement, and professed herself willing to go away at once. Lord St. Quentin declared his intention of going to Norway for a tour—he could not stand a season in town, he declared; his future was settled, and Rosalie would get along better without him for a bit, perhaps.

"Gether away from Barrows Court for a bit, grannie," he said, "and things will right themselves. And I should like to get that fellow a situation in Sierra Leone, or some other place where Europeans die off quickly. We'll all nettle down next spring, I hope, and I'll let him know who's master then!"

Only till Christmas. Rosalind was determined to pass the festive season among her own people, and Lord St. Quentin had to promise to be at Barrows Court to help and preside. Perhaps he saw that any further apathy would not do; any way, he promised, and was so gently affectionate to his cousin before he started for his ramble amongst the Norwegian lakes and mountains, that she began to think she had misjudged him, and that their future life would be very happy after all. She was glad to leave town, with all its whirl of business and pleasure, and be at her own old home once more, with her hands full of presents for her beloved retainers, and comforts for the aged and needy on her estates.

She was worshipped there; she had been at home with them all ever since she was born, and her sweet face was radiant with delight as she drove about the lanes and highways, and had a word and a smile for them all. It wanted two days of the great day. Rupert had written to say that he was in England, and would be down without fail, and she was driving alone in a little basket-carriage to a cottage about a mile from Barrows Court to see a poor woman who was ill. Her little trap was laden with comforts for the invalid, and her little children, and Rosalind was thinking of the want of joy that her presence would bring.

To go out alone in this fashion was nothing new to her. Ever since she could remember she had driven a pony and trap like this, and

no one on her own grounds would have thought of molesting her. Young and old—all were proud of helping and protecting the little lady, as she had always been called during her father's life, and the name had stuck to her still. She would always be the little lady to the old folks, whatever the younger ones might call her.

"It was the young lord, sure enough—him as is going to marry our little lady."

The voice came from behind a thick hedge close to her, and she knew it. It was the voice of a rough fellow, an incorrigible poacher and never-to-be-trusted, but a fervent admirer of her for all that. With a curious feeling of something hanging over her, she stopped the pony silently. The speaker had not heard her approach.

"It couldn't be," said another voice—a female one that she did not know.

"It was, as sure as my name is Dick Romer. They stood just over there, in the same lot, near them bushes, and he had her in his arms, holding her close to his heart, and talking to her as a man talks to the woman he loves. I heard him call her his darling; and well he might, for she was as beautiful as an angel!"

"Who was she?"

"How should I know? It wasn't the lady he ought to have been kissing, I know that much. Our lady is fair, and her hair is like a sunbeam; this one was dark as a gipsy, with hair that looked black in the shadow of the trees, and eyes like two stars."

"A wicked hussy, whoever she was!"

"I don't think it," the man said; "she did not look like one of that sort. She was listening, and believing, she was, and he—well, he's a fine-hearted fellow; and someone ought to tell our little lady of his carryings-on. I heard him tell that pretty creature he would be here again to-day about the same time, and she was to be sure not to let any one see her come—she knew the reason he said."

"He ought to be horsewhipped!" the woman said, emphatically. "The scamp! horsewhipping is too good for him! Where did you say they were?"

"Down at the bottom of the ten-acre lot, just at the corner by the wood. They'll be there now, I shouldn't wonder."

"I should like to go and spoil their sport for them!"

"Nay, lass, let well alone; it will come out somehow, never fear. May be, after all, the girl's only a light o' love, and the gentry think nothing of that sort of thing. Come on, we're rested now, and we've a few miles to do before dark to-night yet."

Their footsteps sounded crackling on the dead leaves and dry sticks on the other side of the hedge, and died away in the distance. And Rosalind Ormsby sat in her pony carriage, feeling as if she were turned into stone. She was alone, there was no one in sight, and she felt as if she must be asleep and dreaming, Rupert was not anywhere near Barrows Court—she had heard from him in London only that morning. "Oh! it was all a mistake, or a wicked story invented by Dick Romer. He was capable of it. But she must see for herself—she must find out if this horrible thing is true. Rupert talking with another woman! Holding her to his heart and kissing her lips! Ah! no, it could not be. He would not so insult her. He had asked her to be his wife; and she had said, "Yes." He was the future Lord of Barrows Court—he would not so demean himself. He was careless and unstable, but he was not wicked. She would not believe it, and she would go to the ten-acre lot and see for herself.

She drove on quickly to the woman's house whither she was bound. She had made her plans; she would leave her carriage there and walk to the field. Dick Romer had spoken of it would be getting dark before she could get home after such an expedition; but she would find some excuse. Grannie was used to her erratic ways and would not mind for one.

"Dear, miss, you do look bad yourself!"

was the woman's exclamation, when Rosalind had seated herself for a moment by her bedside; "you are as white as white!"

"I don't think I am quite well," she replied. "I shall be better presently. I have another place to go to, Sally," she added, hastily. "Can I leave the carriage here till I come back? I think I can trust Johnny to take care of it."

"He'll not let any one go a nigh it, miss," the poor woman said. "If I was able to get up I'd look after it myself. It will be quite safe."

"Very well, I'll be back in a very little while," Rosalind said, rising. "I'll sit with you longer next time I come, Sally, to make up for it. I am only going to the ten-acre field."

"And what on earth does she want there?" the woman said to herself, as the young lady disappeared, walking quickly, and with a resolve to go at it as she had made up her mind to do something. "It's lonely on a day like this, and it won't be very long before it's dark. Ah! well, Johnny shall go home with her."

"May I come in, Mrs. Beecher?" asked someone at the door, and the woman's face lighted up with a smile at the sound of Norman Armytage's voice.

"Surely, sir—surely, if you will be so good."

He entered hastily, and looked round him with surprised disappointment.

"Is not Miss Ormsby here? Her pony-trap is outside."

"Yes, sir, and Johnny is taking care of it till she comes back—she won't be long."

"Where is she?"

"I don't know, sir. I'm afraid she's in some trouble or other."

"What do you mean?"

"I hardly know, sir," said the woman; "she was very pale when she came in just now, and said she must leave the pony for a bit; she had somewhere to go. There was trouble in her eyes, sir; there were tears in her voice, though she was calm and quiet when she spoke to me. She was going to the ten-acre field, she said."

"The ten-acre field! What on earth was it took her there?"

"She didn't say, sir."

"The ten-acre field! Great Heaven! the cattle are there! I saw Hopkins leading the bullock down this morning!"

And before Mrs. Beecher had time to consider what he meant by his exclamation, Norman Armytage had gone off at a full speed, and was making his way to the ten-acre field by the shortest route.

CHAPTER V.

VIOLET MANSHER was in love—loving as blindly and as trustfully as ever Eve did, when she listened to the strange new story under the whispering trees of Eden—or she would not have taken her lover upon trust, as she was doing now, and consented to meet him in secret as it were, and keep his comings and goings to herself.

The spot he had chosen—the corner of the ten-acre field, as it was called—though it was close to Barrows Court—was virtually as far from any chance of meeting Rosalind, or anyone from the house, as if it were ten miles away.

In the summer it was frequented enough, but now it was given over to cattle, and the approaches to it from the house were very uneven and dirty, and the wood was fenced up and rarely visited.

Rupert had told the trusting girl, whom he loved with as much intensity as was in his shallow nature, some tale of creditors that had found him out, and some business which would lead to his getting a large sum of money if he held his tongue, and she had believed him and entered into the romance of the thing, and thought herself a heroine, as many girls do, when she looked round in affright lest any one should see her creeping



[NORMAN ARMYNAGE LOOKING THROUGH THE TREES SAW AND UNDERSTOOD ALL.]

by a circuitous route to the place of appointment.

Her father was away on business, and she had been alone for some days, or perhaps she would not have been drawn into so compromising a proceeding as a meeting like this. She passed by Barrons Court near enough for her to see the house through the trees and the tall chimneys rising above them, and it set her thinking of the young girl, no older than herself, who owned all this magnificence.

She had seen her once or twice, and she had asked Rupert a question or two about her; but he had answered her so shortly and with such indifference that she supposed that he did not know anything about the rich Miss Ormsby. Indeed, he had told her that he did not want to know anything about any other girl. Had he not his own Violet, &c?

"Dear Rupert," she said to herself, as she went slowly along the side of the hedge that separated the great field from the wood. "I think if he had to choose between that heiress and me he would take me. I know he would—I am sure of it!"

"Sure of what, my own darling?" and Rupert rose up from where he had been sitting, hidden by some bushes, waiting for her. "Are you apostrophising the rabbits or the cows over there—or what?"

"I was thinking of you," she said. "Did I speak out loud? I don't wonder if I did—my heart is so full it must run over sometimes. No one heard me, I hope."

"I did."

"Ah, you are no one! I think I was saying that I was sure if you had to choose between the mistress of Barrons Court there and me, you would take me, poor as I am."

"You know I would," and he pressed her to his heart, looking into her face with his false eyes, and trying to forget that there was any one on earth besides themselves. "No woman in all the wide earth will ever be to me what you are, my darling—my wife that shall be!"

"Ah, say that again, Rupert! Your wife—

it seems like a fairy-tale. When you are not with me I sit sometimes and wonder if it is all true—whether it is a dream from which I shall wake in the little dark den where you saw me first. I wonder whether you told me the truth that day when you came to buy that lovely bouquet; whether it was not for some one you loved, and—"

"You dear, suspicious little goose! The bouquet was not for myself at all; it was for a gentleman, who had asked me to come for it for a wedding-party. I should like to have given it to you on the spot."

"It would have been a very appropriate present for me, would it not, the florist's clerk?" Violet said, with a little laugh. "It would have made a bright spot in our little room at home. Ah, Rupert, when are you coming to see papa? I don't like deceiving him as I am doing now."

"You are not deceiving him, my dear one! He has asked you no questions, so you have had to tell him no fibs—he simply doesn't know, that is all."

"But it is deceiving him all the same! I don't like it—I would rather you would come to our house openly, and—"

"I know, dear—I know; but it can't be just yet. Why what in the name of—*Rosalind!* as I am a living man."

He spoke the name under his breath, and Violet did not catch it.

"What did you say?" she asked. "Oh, Rupert, look there! There is someone—a lady coming across the field; she does not see the cows—and, oh! look at the bull!"

"You little goose! there's no bull there."

"There is! I saw them bring him in, not half-an-hour ago. As I was turning the corner of the road I met the man with him—a great beast with a chain round his neck. He had a boy with him, and I heard him say the ten-acre field. I should not have known the field had a name but for our meeting at this corner. That is the bull coming across there."

Oh! he sees the lady. Go to her, Rupert! help her!"

She would have pushed her way through the hedge, but he held her back with a strong grasp. She was right; the bull, sullen and fierce from long confinement, had caught sight of the graceful figure that was crossing the field with rapid footsteps, making straight for the corner by the wood where the two figures could be seen standing side by side. Rupert St. Quentin was physically, a coward—mentally, brave enough. His nerves and will failed him in moments of peril or necessity; and for one second they failed him now.

(To be continued.)

A TORNADO PROOF house has been built in Minnesota in the United States by a rich banker, to satisfy his wife, who lives in perpetual dread of such visitation. All the corners are acute angles, and the sides sink back into other angles, giving this architectural freak the shape of a star, while the corners are made very sharp, so as to split tornadoes. From the highest point of the roof the gutters sink suddenly, forming great depressions. The cellar walls are unusually thick, and the timbers of the houses are anchored in these cellars, so that the building may not be blown down without rooting up the foundation.

KING THEEBAW of Burmah is becoming quite a reformed character, according to the Rangoon correspondent of the *Times of India*. He seems to have sown most of his wild oats, and to be devoting himself energetically to State affairs, while he has in a great measure given up drinking brandy to excess. This last improvement is said to be due to the recent birth of a daughter instead of a son and heir, as the Queen, who has thus disappointed her husband for the fourth time, used to ply Theebaw with brandy, but has now completely lost her influence.



["YOU SPOKE AS IF I WAS THE BOLDEST, HORRIDEST GIRL IN THE WORLD," POUTED SIBEL.]

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

CHAPTER I.

ONLY A VALENTINE.

"If there is anyone I detest under the sun it is that abominable brother of yours;" and Sibel Fitzgerald, a lovely girl of eighteen, threw herself down on an angular sofa in Mrs. Forrester's school-room, with a rose-flush on her cheeks, and an indignant sparkle in her large, dark eyes.

"Politely, I must say," said Judith, the eldest born, pursing up her thin lips, but not looking up from the petticoat she was making, out of something as coarse as house-flannel, for the legs of some unfortunate child.

"As if politeness could be expected under the circumstances," tapping the floor impatiently with the toe of her high-heeled shoe.

"Perhaps it wasn't expected," with an acid smile.

"Very good thing, because then you couldn't be disappointed. Look here, Judy," sitting bolt upright and staring her cousin in the face. "You ought to stand by me to-day if you never did before in your life."

"I never let my feelings interfere with my sense of right."

"Never unless good feeling and expediency happen to be the best policy," with a disdainful glance across the table. "What unhappy little creature is to be scrubbed by that awful garment?"

"That is no concern of yours. You insult my brother first, and me next."

"Phil can stand it; he has the hide of a rhinoceros, and you—you irritate me so. I can't help it."

"I am thankful I have not your unfortunate temper. May I ask what Phil, poor boy, has done to offend you?"

"Poor boy, indeed!" her eyes flashing. "If I were a man I would give him a thrashing."

"Ladylike sentiments, upon my word. Do

you know, Sibel, since you paid that visit to Mrs. Hay, at Woolwich, you have grown decidedly vulgar."

"Vulgar! how dare you say so!" her cheeks like a sunset. "I would rather you called me anything else on earth. Say that I tell falsehoods, swindle, or steal!"

"Would you? Then I'm glad to say I can't oblige you! You always tell the truth, because sometimes it's so unpleasant. You never swindled because you wouldn't know how; and do not steal, because you know you would be taken up!"

"And that is your opinion of me?" speaking very slowly.

"Yes; I wouldn't deceive you for the world!"

"I am so glad!" with a sigh of relief. "I've tried so hard to like you, and now I can hate you as much as I like. If it weren't for Rose I should leave to-morrow."

"I am sorry that Rose should keep you," with an air of polite apology. "Perhaps we could induce her to spare you!"

"But I—I have no one else," the corners of the beautiful mouth drooping.

"You might be more grateful to the roof which shelters you!" folding up her work with great precision.

"I could be grateful enough if some of you were only glad to have me!"

"We are always glad to do our duty! You had no one else, so of course our house was open to you. You had better come and dress, or you will be late for dinner, as usual," moving towards the door with careful eyes bent on the carpet to see if any scraps had fallen from her work.

"You haven't heard about Philip?"

"No, and I don't want to! If you would only let him alone it would be better, as mamma does not like that sort of thing between cousins." And with this kind and delicate thrust Miss Forrester quitted the room, leaving Sibel Fitzgerald speechless with indignation.

Oh! if she had any other home to go to. Any place, however pitiful, would be paradise compared with this comfortable country house, where every day one had a chance of a welcome except herself.

Father and mother were both dead. [Her only brother, Sir Guy, was an officer in the 13th Hussars, far away in India; the family estates were heavily mortgaged, and let to strangers; the family revenues were saved to pay off the debt, and only a pittance was left for the brother and sister.

Some day in the future the young baronet hoped to be able to take his proper position in the county, but in order that this might be more than a dream he had to exercise the strictest economy; and as he was generous and extravagant by nature, this was a most difficult task.

Sibel, with the enthusiasm of youth, declared she was willing to live like a pauper, and nothing would induce her to take more than a hundred a-year for her own share, fifty pounds of which were to be paid to her uncle, General Forrester, for her board and lodging.

The end of the year always found her terribly out of pocket, for she had Sir Guy's generous nature, and every want she saw in others she felt she must supply. Her own toilette often suffered in consequence, and she had to bear the piercing remarks of her cousin Judith, who never spent a penny on anyone but herself, so could not understand why Sibel's allowance was not enough for her.

Mrs. Forrester was an invalid, and left the management of the house to Judith, who was a plain girl with rigid principles. Phil, the only son, was the plague of the establishment, always getting into some disreputable scrape or other, from which he wanted his woman-kind to help him. He had a weak, effeminate face, a slim figure, and his clothes always looked as if they had been made miles too big for him. Rose, the youngest daughter, was the pet of the household, a light fairylike little thing, with clouds of yellow

hair, dreamy blue eyes, and her mother's delicacy of constitution. If it had not been for Rose, Sibyl Fitzgerald would have found Coombe Lodge utterly unbearable; but her cousin's smile could always charm her ill-temper away, and the gusts of passion never failed to be silenced by the loving glances of those kind blue eyes.

The school-room door opened, a fair head with straight straw-coloured hair put itself in through the chink, presently followed by a lank body, and a limp pair of legs. Phil Forrester shut the door behind him, and walking quickly across the shabby carpet, leant his arms on the back of the sofa, and said insinuatingly, "Hulca bold girl, let us be friends!"

A maddening toss of the head was the only answer.

"You might you know—it would be the best policy. The master's gone, so there's no one in kicking up a shindy. Wentworth is coming to-night, and I might do you a good turn."

"As if I cared!" the flushed manner checks belying her words.

"You are sponges on him, I really believe, though he's not half such a fellow as the master. Come, I won't say a word about those flirtations at Woolwich if you'll only make it up."

Knowing her cousin's merciless inclination for chaff, the temptation was trying, in spite of the previous provocation. Dudley Wentworth was just the man to think flirtations vulgar, and if Phil chose to repeat and exaggerate all the small follies into which her love of fun had led her during her stay with Colonel and Mrs. Hey, it was quite possible that he might quench her with one scornful glance of his indignant eyes, and never address another word to her during the whole course of the evening.

The quarrel with Phil had been about a valentine, which he had sent in her name to some gentleman of their acquaintance.

"Tell me who it was to, and perhaps I will forgive you?" looking up into his shallow face with her irresistible brown eyes.

A slow smile crept round his lips. "Give me a kiss, and I'll see about it."

She pouted, but forgot to turn away her head as she stooped and took it.

"Now," she said, breathlessly, "tell me!"

But the mean fellow with one bound gained the door, and after extracting a *pas-sal* on the threshold, called out "Not for Joe," and vanished upstairs.

Sibyl rushed after him, only to find him safe in his bed-room, and the door locked.

She had nothing to do but to retire into her own room, and begin her tardy toilette. After all Phil would never have had the courage to play such a trick as the forged valentine or anyone beyond the age of a boy. In spite of his fondness for practical jokes, he was desperately afraid of getting into a scrape, and the mere threat of an appeal to his father would have cowed him, if he had not known Sibyl's nature too well, to credit for a moment that she would betray him. Thus he traded on his cousin's generosity, and played his mean game, for the sake of his own advantage.

The girl's thoughts went from him to Dudley Wentworth, the son of their neighbour, Lord Wentworth of Wentworth Chase. He was just the sort of man to be the idol of a girl's fancy—good-looking enough to win a heart at a glance, aristocratic in appearance, manners and bearing; proud, reserved, but sometimes unbending, when his smile had a rare charm. He had the habit of making other men look like common things in *doff* wear, whilst he seemed of purest porcelain. General and Mrs. Forrester destined him for their eldest daughter, and the match was supposed to be a fitting climax to a friendship begun almost in the cradle. Judith had a tidy fortune of her own, bequeathed to her by her godmother, and it was supposed that her dowry would be a welcome addition to the Wentworth's failing resources. She had been brought up with the idea that she would one day be called upon to fill the place of a peeress, and it had been

a considerable shock to her feelings when the heir, after a long absence, made his appearance at a garden-party at Coombe Lodge, and devoted himself for half the afternoon to that insignificant little Sibyl Fitzgerald. Ever since that day Sibyl had been kept out of his way, but when two people live within a few miles of each other, and it is a case of mutual attraction, it is sometimes convenient to be told that there is no room in the marriage, and recommended to take a walk in the lanes.

They had met by accident half-a-dozen times or more, and Judith would have nearly died of mortification if she had known that whilst she was paying a state call with her mother at Wentworth Chase Dudley, having met Sibyl out on her pony, was giving her a riding lesson in a retired corner of the Park, which was hidden from the windows by a wealth of trees.

Judith had flowers from the shabbiness, wherewith to adorn her symmetrical figure, but Sibyl had nothing but a few snowdrops fastened in with a small pearl butterfly which had once belonged to her mother.

Still she looked very charming as she walked into the drawing-room in her simple dress of cream-coloured muslin, trimmed with valenciennes lace. Dudley Wentworth rose slowly from the ottoman, where he had been busily answering the many questions which Judith Forrester thought it right to address to him; but another man crossed the room with a quicker step, and before she knew he was there, Sibyl found her hand clasped tightly by Major Lushington.

"This is a delightful surprise, Miss Fitzgerald," his eager tones making the fact patent to the whole roomful. "I hadn't an idea that I should meet you to-night!"

"I told you that I was living with General Forrester," disengaging her hand, and passing on, but not before she had met the full gaze of his glowing eyes and blushed in conscious response.

Wentworth's greeting was colder than usual, as he bowed in a deferential manner over her hand, placed a chair for her and remained his own seat by Judith's side, as if he had no special interest in her proceedings. There were other guests to whom she would naturally have tried to make herself agreeable, but at present the room seemed to contain only two men—the one who might, according to circumstances be either her blessing or her bane, the other, who was certain, if he had much to do with her, to be her most bitter curse.

CHAPTER II.

"IS SHE A FLIRT?"

"To-morrow is the fourteenth of February, Miss Fitzgerald!" and Major Lushington looked towards the bright face beside him with an amused smile. "Do you remember that you once promised to send me a valentine?"

Sibyl caught Wentworth's eye across the table, fixed on her with a glance of disapproval, and crimson with vexation, said, quickly,

"I never meant it! You know I never did!"

"I think you did once; but that was six months ago—a long time for a woman."

"Not long at all!" confidedly; "but it was nothing but nonsense from the first!"

"What was nonsense?"—laying down his knife and fork—"not the interest I took in you, or the pleasure you gave me?"

"I think you are mixing me up with somebody else!" she said, and aches, and with a frantic wish to disown her past doings. They were innocent enough, but indiscretions seemed like crimes in her present frame of mind, with her beau ideal of manhood sitting just opposite to her by Judith's side. "There were lots of girls at Woolwich, and there is nothing very striking about me."

"Let me be the best judge of that," with a glance of ardent admiration which he did not care to conceal. "Do you know I kept a pro-

gramme like a love-sick schoolboy, because your name was upon it for more than half-a-dozen dances?"

"Half-a-dozen! Good gracious, Belle, that was coming it pretty strong!" put in Phil, who was sitting on her left.

"Not if I were desperately in want of partners," with an air of great gravity.

"Put it the other way, and you will be nearer the truth," observed the Major, quietly.

"I remember the partners were desperately in want of you—only I managed to keep them at bay. But as to the valentine, you can't have forgotten it; in the garden at the Hays. You had lost your pearl brooch—the one you are wearing now—and we looked for it in the moonlight when the rest had gone in."

"I remember the brooch," looking down at it fondly; "because I was so miserable till you found it."

"And the valentine was to be my reward. I shall be horribly disappointed if I don't get it."

"Then I am afraid you will be. I am older and wiser now,"—surely Dudley must hear that, and laugh!—"and I shouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"Don't think of it, but do it. It is wrong to break a promise."

"Still worse sometimes to keep it."

"The worst promise ought to be kept," with a grave shake of his head. "Whatever it is, if you don't keep it, it is doing harm that a possible good may come of it. The harm is certain, the good problematical."

"It is doing a small harm, perhaps, to prevent a great one."

"Is there small harm in breaking faith? That is a woman's doctrine, not a man's."

"A woman's!" opening her large eyes in breathless indignation. "As if we were not always truer, always more faithful than men!"

"Prove it, or be content with having the charm on your side, and leave the truth to us. I shall wait till to-morrow to know if old friendship is to be forgotten, like everything else."

"There will be nothing from me."

"Of course you would not tell me. Cupid is supposed to be the postman on the 14th, and seals all the letters."

"I never made his acquaintance."

"I thought I had intruded you; but it isn't too late. Lose your bunch of snowdrops to-night, and let us look for them in the moonlight."

"Thank you; it is rather too cold."

"I thought you were, not the weather!"

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't be?" looking up saucily into his dark face.

"A thousand! Some day you may find them out."

"Much good it would do you; you at Woolwich and I at Coombe Lodge."

"There are such things as railways."

"Yes; but I am never to use them again."

"Why not, for Heaven's sake?" with a look of dismay.

"Because a dear old man, old enough to be my grandfather, the last time I was in a train offended me—*Pauk*, and asked me to give him my book."

"Only that he might get her to talk to him," put in Phil, who had been unusually silent. Old hypocrite, I wish I had been there."

"I should like to find out who he was, and thank him," said the Major, looking desperately angry.

"He only meant to be kind."

"Very kind, indeed, bordering on the affectionate. But I assure you, Miss Fitzgerald, if you would only let me know the next time you are coming to the Hays, I would run down on purpose to escort you."

"Very kind," murmured Phil, in an audible aside; "bordering on the affectionate."

Sibyl bit her lip to prevent smiling.

"You are very good, but where would be the chaperon?"

"Here!" touching his own chest with his finger. "Couldn't you trust me?" "I could trust myself, but what would my aunt say?"

"She calls us old friends already," with an amused look in his eyes; "and you may be sure I didn't contradict her."

"Then I shall," very composedly, as she gathered up her fan and handkerchief ready for departure, as Mrs. Forrester rose.

"Would it be wise?" in a confidential whisper.

She flashed at him an indignant look over her shoulder, then followed the rest of the ladies out of the room.

Everything seemed to go wrong that evening. Mrs. Forrester mildly rebuked her for being too much engrossed with her friend to pay enough attention to the rest of the guests.

Judith took a quiet opportunity to tell her that Mr. Wentworth had asked her to learn a duet with him; and, noticing her flirtation with Major Lushington, had remarked that girls of a certain type were always ready to be made love to.

Her common sense told her that if she had known the context the effect of the speech might have been very different, but her feelings were too deeply engaged to let common sense have its way.

Rose, who was too young as yet to dine when there were several extra guests, fluttered about from group to group, with something pleasant to say to everyone she came across.

"What is the matter, Belle?" she said, in a whisper. "You look as black as that Major Lushington's moustaches. Do you know I don't like him, though Phil says he is so awfully kind to him?"

"When did you see him?"

"I peeped over the banisters, as you were going down to dinner. I wouldn't have him, dear. He loves you to distraction, so Phil says, but I could fancy his killing you, if he got jealous."

"Phil talks an immense deal of nonsense. Rose, wait one moment," taking hold of her skirt. "Did you happen to see a letter directed to Hugh on the hall-table?"

"Phil wrote to him, if you mean that; but what do you want to know for? Has he asked him here?" with sudden eagerness.

"Not that I know of. Now go and talk to Mr. Stewart. It is all right," she said to herself, with a smile. "The valentine was to him. I might have known that Phil only wanted to tease me."

Hugh Macdonald was a boy who lived at Wentworth Chase, a ward of the Viscount's. He was often at Coombe Lodge, and nothing pleased him better than to be able to render any small service to either of the girls. To Rose he had always been devoted, but since Sibyl's advent his allegiance had been somewhat divided. Dudley was very kind to him, and made him his companion as much as he could. But during his long absences the boy was dull, and glad to find friends outside the precincts of the Chase.

The gentlemen came into the drawing-room with that air which they all affect of having no one in particular to look for, in spite of which each in turn made his way to the point which he desired to reach. Mr. Wentworth strolled up to Judith, and Major Lushington dropped down into a seat by Sibyl Fitzgerald's side. At any other time she might have been pleased to amuse herself with him, but not now, with Dudley only a few yards from her, and watching every word and look while pretending to be engrossed with Miss Forrester's conversation. He had not taken the trouble to exchange a dozen words with Sibyl, and her heart was very sore at his neglect.

Presently there was a little music, and Judith, taking her place at the piano, laboured through a lovely piece of Chopin's. Major Lushington got up to put down Sibyl's cup, and she immediately escaped to the other side of the room, where she sat herself down by

the rector's wife. Mrs. Stewart and Dudley Wentworth were great friends, but he gave one glance in her direction, then walked away to the hearthrug, where General Forrester was discussing the poor-rate and other congenial topics.

That last move had been Sibyl's forlorn hope, and her spirits went down to zero. Hiding her dejection as best she could, she exerted herself to be agreeable, and succeeded so well that a small circle gathered round the ottoman on which she was sitting with Mrs. Stewart. Judith looked at her with jealous eyes, never smiling at her innocent, girlish look, because she could not bear to think that her cousin commanded more attention than herself, whilst Rose joined in and added her own sweet voice to the conversation, not averse of, but rejoicing in Sibyl's conquests.

The pleasantest evening must come to an end, and just about eleven there was a general move. Wentworth tapped Lushington on the shoulder.

"Ready?" "Not ready—I never shall be," with a sentimental sigh, as he got up slowly; "Good-bye, Miss Fitzgerald, till to-morrow. I may call, mayn't I?" in a lower tone.

"Ask my aunt, not me," with a shrug of her dainty shoulders.

"We shall be very glad to see any friend of Mr. Wentworth's," said Mrs. Forrester, graciously.

The Major raised his eye-brows, preferring to owe his welcome to his own merits rather than to his friend's.

"Never mind, Belle," said Phil, as he followed her upstairs, and the girl gave a weary sigh; "If you want to bring your love-affairs to a happy ending, I'll tell you the way to do it."

"And what's that?" leaning against the banisters.

"Go to the top of the wishing knoll at twelve o'clock to-morrow night; only you are too great a coward to do it."

"I shouldn't mind it in the least; only what would be the good of it?"

"Great good! Only as I told you before, you are too great a coward to do it. I don't suppose anything would drive you there."

"I have more pluck than you any day!"

"Have you? By Jove! I should like to see you do it!"

"Drink this well,
And you shall bring
The right man, Belle,
With the wedding ring."

I'd bet you anything you like, that you wouldn't do it."

"Will you tell me about the valentine if I go?"

An odd look came over his face.

"If you don't find out I'll tell you."

"Honour bright? I wish I could trust you."

"Honour bright! Seriously, I mean it, no humbug."

"Then good-night!" With a little nod she ran upstairs, and he slid down the banisters into the hall, looking uncommonly pleased with himself.

CHAPTER III.

A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

"Good morning, Miss Fitzgerald!" Off went Dudley Wentworth's hat, as he came up to the stile on which Sibyl was perched. "Any letters to post? I am on my way now."

The pretty face blushed, but its owner had not forgotten that last night this same young man had scarcely dared to speak to her, and she answered as coldly as she could,—

"Thanks, I never write any."

"Not even a valentine?" his dark eyes twinkling mischievously.

"I did when I was a child, not since!" with great dignity.

"Don't you find it cold sitting up there? Are you waiting for anyone?"

"No. Perhaps you think I am waiting for Major Lushington!" her eyes flashing.

"It did cross my mind," a small smile hovering round the resolute mouth.

"Then I am much obliged to you for your opinion of me. Judith told me"—her bosom heaving—"that that you said I was like other girls."

"In what way?" his face growing suddenly stern, as he felt sure that Miss Forrester had been making mischief between them.

"I can't tell you," turning away her crimson face.

"But you must. It can't be very dreadful if I said it."

"Just as if I was the boldest, horriest girl in the world!"

"What was it that I said?" leaning over the stile, so as to get a better view of her blushing cheeks.

"That I was always ready to be made love to" came out in a small voice, whilst her eyes dropped in overwhelming confusion.

He frowned. "Absurd! you couldn't have thought it! What I said was that some girls were not content with the homage of one, but must have half-a-dozen lovers at their beck and call. This had no reference to anyone in the room. What I thought and kept to myself I will tell you," taking hold of her hands, and holding them close. "I fancied that one little girl was ready to forget her old friend in the fascinations of the new."

"Never! it was all your fault. You never came near me."

"Crying, my little Belle?" putting his arm round her with great tenderness, as one big drop after another rolled down her milken lashes. "I—I really must wipe them away," and he did so with his golden moustaches.

"Mr. Wentworth!" shrinking from him, and trembling all over.

"I couldn't help it—I'm fearfully sorry. It's Valentine's Day. Sibyl, you won't be angry with me. You know I couldn't mean to be rude," catching hold of her hand again.

"But—but," still too shy to raise her eyes.

"I can't bear to see anyone cry, especially when I'm so fond of her. What shall I do without you, when I am far away in India?"

"India! you are not going!" with wide-open, terrified eyes.

"Sooner or later I must. We heard bad news this morning," with a heavy sigh.

"Wentworth is to be shut up, and the poor old dad will have to find another home."

"But you will come back?" her thoughts going confusedly from calamity to another, but returning quickly to the one point of greatest interest.

"Yes! when you have all forgotten me."

She lifted her eyes to his proud, patrician face. Would she ever in all her life see its like again?

The look was better than a thousand protestations.

"You won't?" he said, softly; "then there will be something to look forward to. I have not said a word to anyone but you, so don't mention it."

"Not too soul!" There was a long silence. He was thinking of the ruin which had come upon his home—the sorrow and discomfort it would bring to his grey-haired father; and she, her thoughts went far and wide, but always returned to the man by her side, like wandering birds to their nests.

"Mr. Wentworth," with a timid touch on his arm, "I shall be quite well off one day."

"Glad to hear it," with a smile. "You'll make the 'happy man' still happier if you bring him a dowry."

"I shall never marry," a resolution born in a moment—but couldn't it, the money I mean, be of some use to your father? It would make me so intensely happy if it could!"

"My own little Belle, do you think he would give up a child like you?" his eyes softening with extreme tenderness. "He has lost thousands upon thousands. The whole of your fortune would be like a drop in the ocean—but the sympathy of your loving little

heart will do us more good than anything else. I mustn't keep you, and I mustn't stay. Good-bye, my dear little friend." He looked at her long and fixedly; then slowly stooped his head, and kissed her hands.

He looked back as he turned the corner of the lane, and raised his hat. The girl was still gazing after him, with wistful eyes, as she might look, "through years of parting pain," but never see that straight, tall form, the mere sight of which in the distance seemed to make the fields and hedges smile into new beauty.

"Have I gone too far?" he thought to himself, as he pursued his way to the post-office. "She looked so tempting with the tears on her lashes, and girls forget so easily." Still though he comforted himself with this time-honoured truth, his conscience felt uneasy, and it was a relief to conscience—not his heart—to think he should probably see her only once again before his departure. When he came back—alas! for the changes that were sure to greet him—this young girl, whose freshness and innocence were her greatest charm, might have become a woman of the world, with Lushington for her husband. Fancy that pure sweet face, which never looked so charming as when it blushed, amongst the citizen belles of Woolwich! Ugh! the thought was detestable! but it was no affair of his. When he came to the village-shop, where Her Majesty's mails were collected, he found that his letters were too late for the post. He was not one of those men who always make other people or things answerable for their own mistakes, so he did not anathematize his watch or growl at the post-mistress, but he smiled to think it was through a girl that he lost the time. "More in Lushington's line than mine."

"Well, Belle, beginning to funk?" asked Phil in a whisper, as he gave her her bedroom candle.

"Not in the least; but how am I to get out?" "I'll manage that, and take you through the shrubbery—there's a cousin for you!"

"You ought to be ashamed of dragging me out at all. Why won't you tell me now?"

"Nonsense; you ought to do it once in your life. Rose did it last year, and Judith, when she was a girl."

"Judith? I can't fancy it," with an incredulous smile.

"There was a fellow here who made her—between you and me she was spoons on him—but she spilt the water before she got it to her mouth, and he kicked the bucket before the year was out."

"Then it brings ill-luck as well as good?" in an awfully struck voice.

"Of course it does, if you spill it. I shall be at the glass-door at a quarter to twelve!"

"Where's Sibel?" inquired a harsh voice, from inside the drawing-room.

"Here, uncle!" with some trepidation.

"What do you stand whispering on the stairs for? Get to bed, and take these flowers with you!" appearing at the door with a vase in his hand, containing a bouquet of violets and snowdrops which had been sent to Miss Fitzgerald anonymously that morning.

"Aunt Mary thought they looked so pretty," taking them from him, and looking down at them admiringly.

"I don't want them left here as an advertisement of your flirtations," said the General, severely. "If you don't mind receiving them, at least have the common decency to put them somewhere out of sight."

"Could I send them back, when I didn't know where they came from?" her eyes flashing resentfully.

"Don't dispute the point. The girls of the present day have a standard of their own, so low that the first man with a barber-face and a long tongue can reach it."

"You forget that the people who come to the house are your guests, not mine! I don't choose them, or they might be very different," crimson with indignation.

"Yes, all of the stamp of that flashy fellow last night! The less we see of him the better! Good-night!" and to close the conversation he shut the door in his niece's face.

She retired to her room, boiling over with passion. It was always the same story. If any man chose to pay her attention he was always scouted by the higher powers.

There was nothing against Major Lushington as far as the eyes of the world were concerned. He was decidedly good-looking, not so aristocratic in bearing as Wentworth; but no one could mistake him for anything else but a gentleman. His manners were easy, and his conversation agreeable; but all these advantages were forgotten because he chose to devote himself to a poor girl who ought to be snubbed.

Sibel felt very kindly towards him, as she detached a few of the flowers from a bouquet and pinned them in her dress. She had no doubt that they came from him—no delusions on the subject of Dudley Wentworth. The blusher stole over her cheeks as she remembered their meeting that morning. He had said that if she did not forget him there would be something to look forward to when he came back. Precious words to be for ever stored in a faithful heart, and like many hidden treasures to bring their burden of sorrow.

She would think of him as she drank the water of the Wishing Well, and take immense care that not a drop should be spilt on the way to her lips. It was a foolish thought, but she had been brought up by an unwise nurse, who had cherished her superstitious fancies instead of laughing at them.

And then, when she came back, she would force the truth out of Phil, and not be put off by any of his shifty evasions. If the valentine had been sent to anyone but a boy she would write straight to its recipient and tell him frankly that she had not sent it, so that if any of the gossip of the neighbourhood should get hold of the story the right version should be spread instead of the wrong, and Dudley should know for certain that she was free from blame.

It was a cold night, and the thought of venturing into the dark was not pleasant; but she was not a girl to be daunted by such minor difficulties; and in a tolerably cheerful state of mind she wrapped herself in a fur cloak, and tied a veil round her small fur toque. Then she put out her candle, opened the door cautiously, and crept downstairs, knowing that the General was probably fast asleep on the drawing-room sofa, irritating his gentle wife by his absence, and doing no good to himself or to anyone else.

"Are you there, Phil?" in an anxious whisper, as she reached the glass door.

"All right!" gruffly, as he pulled back the bolt, and with his coat buttoned up to his chin stepped out into the frosty air.

"I say, Belle, what a lark it would be if the governor came after us!"

"A lark I shouldn't admire. I wish it weren't quite so dark," as she nearly tumbled over the edge of a flower-bed.

"Here, give me your hand," taking his own rather reluctantly out of his pocket. "What a little bit of a thing it is, only fit for a baby!"

"I didn't come here to talk nonsense," with severe gravity.

"Do you ever do anything else? Look here, Belle, we've always been good friends, and you are not going to turn spiteful."

"If you call it friendship, to be always quarrelling and wishing each other at the bottom of the sea."

"But I never did. I bet you we get on better together than half the husbands and wives."

"We simply get on because we must. I have nowhere else to go to, no more have you."

"And so long as you are here to tease I don't mind staying," coming to an abrupt halt, as they reached a small gate in the paling.

"Won't you come any further?" with a

look of dismay at the gloomy space of wet field in front of her.

"Can't!" shaking his head. "It's against the agreement."

"What do you mean?" looking back at him with a vague suspicion.

"Nothing," with a short laugh, "only it would break the charm."

"Wait for me then. Don't go away, promise me that," her boasted courage ebbing fast.

"I'll be here if you are not too long."

"There'll be nothing to keep me," and she sped across the damp grass, followed by Phil's provoking laugh.

After all she felt rather a fool, as she began slowly to mount the "Wishing Knoll," a small eminence scarcely to be dignified by the name of a hill, which rose abruptly just the other side of the hedge, with gorse bushes growing up its sides, and a few tall pines at the top. The only sound that met her ears was the gurgling of the stream, which was said to own such wonderful spells for good or ill. If it could only bring good luck to Dudley Wentworth she would scramble at nothing; but as her faith was slight she felt annoyed at slipping about, tearing her dress and scratching her hands, as she caught hold of some brambles to save herself from falling.

At last, out of breath, and quite warm from her exertions, she gained the top, and only stopped an instant to admire the view, as the moon sailed slowly from behind a cloud and displayed the misty valley at her feet. Putting up her veil to see better, she turned her face to the shining roofs of the little village resting amongst the shadowy trees, the spire of the church, made white by the moonbeams, the river flowing cold and placid between the pollard willows on its banks.

The view was very charming, but, oppressed by her sense of utter loneliness, she was anxious to hurry back to the shelter of her own bedroom. So she bent over the water, which shone like a star in its rocky basin, stretched out her white arm, from which the cloak fell back, took the iron cup in her hand, filled it with the utmost care, and raised it to her lips with a prayer for Dudley; but before they touched its brim some one came hurrying, crushing through the thicket. The cup fell from her hand, the precious drops were spilt, as a man clasped her in his arms, and raised his passionate kisses on her face, while an eager voice exclaimed,—

"My darling, it was so good of you to come!"

Panting for breath, frightened and furious, she struggled to set herself free.

"Let me go—let me go!"

"No," said Major Lushington, with a happy laugh, as he drew her still closer to his throbbing heart. "You little witch, you sent for me, and I feel inclined to keep you for ever!"

Then like a lightning flash it darted through her mind—Phil had betrayed her, and she felt as if she must sink into the ground with shame. What would Dudley Wentworth say to this?

(To be continued.)

THE CITY OF CAIRO.—The city of Cairo is the modern capital of Egypt. It is built on the plain and the lower slopes of a rocky range, the citadel built by Saladin standing two hundred and fifty feet above the level of the town. The houses of the rich class are built in an elaborate arabesque style, the windows shaded with projected cornices of graceful wood-work, and ornamented with stained glass. Among the buildings which owe their existence to European influence, the Italian opera, the French theatre, the Hippodrome, and the French and English churches, may be mentioned. The system of public instruction is surpassingly good. The population is three hundred and fifty thousand.

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

CHAPTER XV.—(continued.)

"But we wrote to you," put in Pussy, prettily. "I wrote to Florence myself, and begged her to come to our wedding. It was terribly quiet, but I knew she would forgive that!"

"We have been away from home," said Alan, quickly. "I never had your letters. I wanted to see Cecil on a little matter of business, and I cross-questioned his late landlady until she gave me his address; but, indeed, I had no idea I should interrupt his honeymoon!"

"I'll forgive you," said Pussy, prettily. "I am going into the drawing-room now, and when you have quite done the business you must come to me there, and I will give you some coffee."

As she left the room, and Alan saw her feeble, wavering step, he understood that she had indeed been very ill. The fondness in Cecil's eye, as he looked at his young wife, had at least convinced the Earl of his mistake. His cousin was guiltless. He had really wronged him by his suspicions.

Captain Fane closed the door on his bride, then he came back to the other two.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "I could not press you to tell me before, because all anxiety or excitement is dangerous for my wife; but from the moment you came in I saw that that some heavy trouble was upon you."

"You tell him," said Alan, to his old friend. "Heaven help me! I cannot!"

"There has been some terrible misunderstanding," said Mr. Lyster, simply. "Lady Elsdale has left her home."

"Left her home!" cried Cecil, in horror. "When?—what drove her away?"

"It was the tenth of May. She was seen in your company on that day, and we thought you might have some clue to her whereabouts."

"For Heaven's sake, help me, if you can!" said Alan, turning to his cousin in blank despair.

"Of course I will help you; but you must have been cruel to her to drive her to such a step! I suppose she told you all? I know you are a proud man, but the fault was none of hers. You might have forgiven her."

"She told me nothing! I have never seen her since I passed her in a hansom cab seated at your side."

"I was there by an accident," said Cecil, simply. "I met her, and, when I heard where she was going, I insisted upon accompanying her. It did not seem to me fit she should drive through such a neighbourhood alone."

"Where was she going?"

"Have you no idea?"

"None!"

"It is her secret. I doubt if I ought to tell you without her leave!"

"You must tell me!" said Alan, hoarsely. "The doubt and misery of all this are killing me!"

"The last words to me were that she would confide all to you herself. She said anything was better than her present life."

"She was not happy," said the Earl, sadly; "I always knew that."

"She was not happy," admitted Cecil. "She had two causes for sorrow. She had a secret which pressed heavily on her, and people had told her the story of your early love; and she believed, poor child, your heart had wandered from her back to Lady Dane."

"And she told you this?"

"She told me nothing but the secret, the rest I guessed. I hold no common interest in your wife, Alan. She is the daughter of my dear, dead friend, and she is Pussy's favourite relation."

"The secret," gasped Alan, "you are bound to tell it me!"

"You married Miss Warburton as an

orphan. Did you ever hear anything of her mother?"

"I heard that she was very beautiful, and that the Colonel never recovered her loss."

"Just so! He never recovered her loss—it broke his heart; but the word loss, in such sense, generally means death. Mrs. Warburton did not die!"

There flashed upon Alan's mind the strange hints thrown out by Mr. Fox in his one tête-à-tête with him.

"I don't understand!" he said, hoarsely.

"Within three days of her wedding Florence Warburton learnt that the mother she had mourned as dead was alive, and living in penury in London. The Colonel's wife had been sinned against, not sinned. Vicious tongues had made an estrangement between her and her husband. Too proud to exculpate herself she flew from home. It was only when Colonel Warburton sought his revenge he learned the truth. His wife had been true to him through all, and now she had left him because she could not bear to remain at his side and see that he did not trust her."

"And they were reconciled?"

Cecil shook his head.

"No; the Colonel believed her dead. He went out to India in that belief. She lived in London, and supported herself by needlework. She might have concealed her identity to the end, but rumour reached her that her daughter was on the point of marriage. The mother-love would not be denied a sight of her child. She went to Foxgrove, intending to let Florence believe she was her old nurse; but nature was too strong for them both."

A long, long silence.

"You are a proud man," said Cecil, hotly, "but you have no cause to blush for your wife. To my thinking, her mother's story is too sad and pitiful to call for anything but sympathy. Florence would have been unworthy of herself had she refused all intercourse with her. I can quite understand that she kept her secret only from fear of losing your love."

"Do you think she is with her mother?" cried Alan, eagerly.

"I am sure of it! On that day, when you saw your wife at my side, she had been to her mother, at the latter's urgent request. She was, she feared, very ill. She yearned for the sight of her daughter's face. If you want your wife, Alan, you will find her in loving tendance on Mrs. Warburton. And, I think, if your pride can ever forgive the existence of her mother, your wife will be the more precious to you for this temporary trouble."

Alan turned on him with bloodshot eyes.

"How am I to thank you?"

"By making her happy," was the short reply.

Alan's face lighted up with a strange new hopefulness.

"She shall be happy," he said, passionately. "If I only find her I will make her forget all her sorrows. It was her great mistake to keep her secret from me. I may be proud, but whatever her parentage I could never have left off loving Florence. I will go to her tonight and tell her we will begin afresh, and that I will join with her in showing all honour and respect to her mother."

"You can't go to-night," said Cecil; "you won't be back in London till after ten."

"And you have not told me where."

Cecil gave the address, marvelling that he should have recollect it, and then he once more begged his friends not to mention the object of their visit before his bride.

"What does your mother say to your becoming a married man?" inquired his cousin.

"She is delighted."

"Mrs. Cecil Fane looks sadly changed from the sprightly Miss Fox I remember. What caused her illness?"

"Worry," returned Cecil. "Her mother almost killed her. I made up my mind we would never be parted again, and so I told Mrs. Fox I should stay at the Court until I took Pussy away with me. The doctor was on my side, and the old man too, so we planned

a wedding by special license in the drawing-room at the Court, and dispensed with trousseau, bridesmaids, and wedding-cake; when Mrs. Fox reproached us we offered to dispense with her presence also."

"I am quite sure she did not accept your offer," said Alan, gravely.

"Oh, dear, no; she was there, and cried the whole time to think that a daughter of hers should be married in such a fashion."

"Well, I never thought you would go to the Court to seek a wife!"

"You set me the example."

"You look happy."

"You see," said Cecil, archly, "I followed your lordship's example in yet another detail. I fell in love with my bride before I knew that she was an inmate of Foxgrove Court."

"And where shall you live?"

"We shall spend the summer here; after that I suppose we must think of an establishment."

A message from Pussy summoned the gentlemen to coffee. She looked very anxiously at Alan as he came to sit by her.

"Is there anything the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You look so ill."

"I came here in great trouble, but Cecil has comforted all my fears, and I am going home in the best of spirits."

"You will tell Florence to write to me, won't you, Lord Elsdale?"

He promised, but he was dimly conscious the while that his wife was not as yet restored to him. He might have much heavy disappointment yet to endure before he held Florence again in his arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

LODIE ELSDALE went straight from Keston to his own luxurious mansion. He informed his servants that their mistress was detained by indisposition, and having undergone the torture of their inquiries and lamentations he found himself at last alone in his private sitting-room; a silver salver filled up with the correspondence which had accumulated in his absence in front of him.

He looked through the letters eagerly; perhaps he hoped against hope that one of them might bring him some tidings of his wife, but if so he was disappointed. There were cards of invitation by the dozen, letters from friends and acquaintance, a few affectionate protestations as the dates grew recent respecting the extraordinary silence of himself and his wife, but there was neither word nor line which told him more about Florence than he knew already.

He did not despair. He felt almost certain of finding his darling in Caroline-street. He had caught a ray of hope from Cecil Fane. Surely if Florence had gone to her mother she would remain with her. He quite forgot that his cousin had said Mrs. Warburton was dangerously ill.

There was very little sleep for Lord Elsdale that night, but towards morning he dropped into an uneasy slumber; and it was past nine when he awoke with a start to find that it was already the hour at which he meant to be in Caroline-street.

Breakfast did not take long. The Earl got into his cab and drove to the corner of the Tottenham-court-road, and he alighted and walked briskly on until he came to Caroline-street. It was only when he knocked at the door that he remembered he had no idea by what name to ask for his wife.

"I want to see a lady who is staying here," he said, courteously.

"What name, sir?"

He hesitated.

"I think you have a lodger called Miss Daw?"

"Yes, sir. She was with us many years. I hope you did not want her!"

"I did—at least I wanted a young lady whom I thought I should find with her."

The woman seemed alarmed at the eagerness of his words.

"A slight young lady, sir?—dressed all in black, with soft, brown eyes, and a sad, sweet face?"

"Yes!" recognizing the description at once. "Will you let me see her?"

"She is not here, sir. She has left some days ago—more than a week."

Alan could have torn his hair.

"But you know where she is gone?"

The woman shook her head.

"Then Miss Daw knows! Let me see her!"

"She is dead, sir. She died the very day after the lady came. I don't know what relations they were, but she must have loved her very much—she cried so terribly when she was gone. She paid all Miss Daw's debts, and then she bought some beautiful white flowers, and sat all day making garlands for the coffin."

There was a great lump in Alan's throat.

"My good woman," he said, hoarsely, "I am a rich man. I will give you fifty pounds if you will tell me where that young lady went to!"

The landlady sighed.

"I'd like to have the money, sir; but it's no use; I don't know where she is gone."

"But, surely, she said something when she wished you good-bye?"

"She never said good-bye, sir. She paid up everything, as I told you, and then she sat counting the money in her little purse, and I'd a mind to tell her she could stay here a bit and not trouble about the rent until she could turn herself around. She was such a child you see, sir; I knew she wasn't used to shift for herself."

"And you told her so?"

"No, sir. I was just a-going when the bell called me down-stairs, and I thought I'd speak to her in the evening. Well, I went upstairs when I had had my bit of supper, but she was gone!"

"Gone!"

"Just that, sir. She had packed up her few things in a little bag she had and gone. I thought at first she would come back. I sat up late that night waiting for her, and the next, too, but she never came!"

There was such blank misery—such utter hopelessness—written upon Alan's face that even the rough, uneducated woman was troubled.

"I was thinking, sir, Mr. Gibbs might be able to help you—he's the parish doctor, sir, and a good, kind man. It was he came to see Miss Daw when she was dying."

Alan pressed a handsome sum into the woman's hand and went out. He had little hope of Mr. Gibbs' powers, but he resolved to try them, and found his way to the tall, gloomy house where the surgeon resided.

Mr. Gibbs was out. What hard-worked, general practitioner in a poor neighbourhood would be found at home at eleven o'clock, unless it was a *gratia* morning?

Alan waited until he grew almost mad with suspense. The clock was chiming one when Mr. Gibbs entered.

Now, the worthy doctor had had more than one conversation with Florence after her mother's death, and the girl's sweet, sad face had touched his very heart. She had told him she was poor and friendless—that she meant to work hard to keep herself; but she had not told him that she was a wife—whose whole heart was a sorrows for lack of her husband's love.

Mr. Gibbs, seeing her rare beauty, her elegant attire, had hit upon a theory of his own, as utterly unfounded as it well could be. He pitied Florence, but this theory prevented him from asking her to his house, or even recommending her for any post in a family. He believed that the secret in her life was one of sin as well as sorrow. He was kind and merciful, but he felt that he could do nothing for her. He told her so when she asked

his advice, adding that, in his judgment, her best plan was to go back to her relatives.

"London is no place for you," he said, kindly. "Indeed, indeed, you are better away under the protection of your relations!"

"But I have none!" None who would befriend me!" said Florence, sadly. "There is no one now to care very much what becomes of me. I wish it were not wrong to take my own life! I am so weary—so troubled!"

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, almost roughly, though his eyes were not dry. "You mustn't talk like that, and before long you won't be so lonely."

Florence raised her brown eyes wistfully to his face.

"My dear," he said, putting one hand upon her shoulder in kind, fatherly fashion. "Don't you know that before many months are over you will have someone to care for, and to care for you?"

The girl flushed crimson. He little guessed the reason—little suspected the child whose advent, he feared, would be only another sorrow, was the lawful heir of an English peerage.

To Florence it had come home with a sharp, keen pain that the child Alan had longed for would never know its father's kisses.

"I think I am glad," she said, looking at the doctor with her sad, wistful face. "It is strange, isn't it? I haven't found this world a very pleasant place myself, and yet I am glad."

"And, for your child's sake, you will bear reason?—you will go home to your friends?"

"I think not," she said, fiercely. "I will try my own plan first. If that fails I will think of yours."

"Well, I will look in now and then to see how you get on."

But the next day he had a few lines, written in a delicate hand, saying he must forgive her; she could not stay in Caroline-street—she felt she must be away. He must not think her ungrateful. She should never forget his kindness.

When Mr. Gibbs saw Lord Emsdale, and heard his errand, his manner froze. Following out his pet theory, this gentleman was a very black sheep indeed.

"I have no idea of the young lady's whereabouts," he said, curtly; "and if I had I should not tell you. I hope she is safe under the protection of her own friends."

Alan looked at Mr. Gibbs in amazement.

"There is some mistake," he said, gravely. "She did not tell you her history—she did not tell you what part I filled in it!"

"I guessed it."

"And you think it right to separate husband and wife? I grant it I have failed miserably in my duty. I have not made her happy, but I love her as my own life."

"And she is your wife?"

A light broke upon Lord Emsdale.

"Surely you never doubted?"

"She was alone and in trouble. She told me there was no one to care what became of her; that, but for its being a sin, she would gladly have taken the life which had become burdensome to her; she told me that. What could I think, but that she was alone in the world?"

"She is my loved and honoured wife!" cried Alan, hoarsely. "Mr. Gibbs, I would give my own life willingly to find her."

The kind old doctor wrung his hand.

"You'll find her yet," he said, cheerfully, "such a face as hers can't be hidden long. I shall live to see her at your side yet, and ask pardon of you both for my hasty judgment."

But his words awoke no answering echo in Alan's heart. The Earl felt that his beautiful young wife was lost to him for ever, that never more would he see the face he loved best on earth.

CHAPTER XVII.

When the young Comte of Emsdale left her humble shelter in Caroline-street she had

formed no plans for the future, excepting that she must seek another refuge, where everything would not remind her so painfully of the mother whose story had been so like her own.

She was less utterly wretched since she had heard Mr. Gibbs' disclosure. There was at least something to look forward to. It seemed to Florence that life would not be all misery, when she held Alan's child in her arms; but her stock of money was failing fast, very few pounds remained to her; for the sake of that wonderful hope held out to her she must struggle to preserve the life she prized so little.

She took a small room in one of the many streets near Bayswater, and she tried to collect her energies and think of some way of earning her own living. Teaching and companionship were both closed to her. Whatever employment she chose must be done at home. It was a difficult task. Miss Frost's pupil had been well educated, but she was without any very striking talent. It seemed to Florence there was nothing before her but doing fancy needlework for the shop. It was not a lucrative career, but it had these recommendations—it could be pursued at home; and it would not bring her face to face with her customers.

She met with greater success than she had expected; the elegant simplicity of her dress, the nameless grace of her whole appearance made a striking impression upon one or two of the chief depots for art needlework. They found that she worked well and quickly, that to careful execution she united quite a gift for designing; and before a month was over a very large West-end firm had engaged her at a salary which seemed ample for her few wants. She called herself Mrs. Warton, and wore her wedding ring openly. It was generally supposed that her husband was abroad, and many were the condolences expressed to her on the subject.

Mme. Budd and Hillier, her employers, were pleasant well-to-do women of the middle class, a little fussy and exacting perhaps, but considerate enough to a clever worker whom it was their interest to keep.

Their connection was a large one, and almost entirely among the aristocracy. Often Florence found herself engaged at work for the decoration of drawing-rooms, where she had been an honoured guest. At first a terror was on her of being recognized by some of her former friends; but she took care to pay her visits to Conduit-street at an hour when they would hardly have breakfasted, and she resolutely declined any commissions which would have necessitated her calling at their houses. It was a strange sort of life for a girl not yet twenty, but save for that awful pain at her heart, save for the yearning longing for her husband, Florence would not have been unhappy. She had never cared much for gaiety. She moved in time to more comfortable apartments—pretty rooms near Camden-town—where a bird sang in the window, and a large tabby cat made friends with the lodger when her day's toil was over.

Of Alan she heard nothing—she was quite cut off from all news of him. She could not tell how he received the tidings of her departure.

Had he mourned a little for the girl wife, who had not been able to keep his love? or did he only regret that the law still bound him to her, and he was not free to pay his addresses to Lady Dane?

In July work slackened, London was emptying fast; and then Mme. Budd and Hillier found time to take a holiday, and afford the same to their assistants. Florence was not sorry—she was feeling far from strong. There had come over her lately a presentiment that Alan would not have to wait much longer for his freedom—that before many weeks were over he would hear that his wife's life no longer stood between him and Sybil Dane.

It was in August that she went to Conduit-street a little later than her wont, and found

her employers in a dilemma. One of their newest customers—a general and his wife, newly returned from abroad—had sent for someone to go and inspect some rare Eastern silks which they had brought home with them, and designed for the hangings of a boudoir. The "young lady" whose province it was was away for her holiday; her deputy was ill, Miss Hillier had a cold, and Miss Ludd confined herself to the business arrangements of the firm—confessing, with charming frankness, she had no more eyeful colour than a barn-door fowl.

"Such charming people!" she said to Florence, in a little burst of praise. "Only just come home—more money than they know what to do with, and yet no affectation or condescension."

"What is the name?"

"Anstruther. The General comes of a grand old family—poor and proud though; but he married an heiress—a lady who literally had more money than she knew what to do with, and they are a devoted couple. I'm sure they seem like lovers yet, and they have been married over twenty years. She was a widow, I think."

But this did not solve the difficulty. At last Florence remembered the Anstruthers had been in England only six weeks. It was three months turned since she left her husband's home, therefore she need not fear their recognizing in the embroideress the missing Countess of Elsdale.

"Shall I go for you, Miss Ludd?"

"I wish you would; but you no expressly stipulated you should never be sent to private houses; that I did not like to ask it."

"I do dislike it very much; but in this case there seems no help for it; and you say they are nice people."

"Charming! they live at Briarley. It would be quite a nice little excursion for you."

Florence did not agree to that, but having yielded the point she agreed to go that very afternoon; and the "firm" having given her a nice little lunch and generously defrayed her travelling expenses, she set out at once for Briarley Park.

Briarley, as every one knows, is fifteen miles from London, in the loveliest part of Surrey; the park was the chief residence in the place, and Mrs. Anstruther had inherited it from her father some years before; only her husband was devoted to his profession, and she would not leave him, so that she waited to take possession of her estate until his term of service was up, and then the pair came slowly back to Europe, stopping at many a fair Asiatic city to make purchases, and returning literally laden with the spoils of the Far East.

The Park was near the station. Florence passed through the lodge-gates, and walked up a grand old avenue of spreading lime-trees. She was a little curious as to her reception; she did not exactly know the greeting meted out to those of her new calling; she gave a little sigh as she reached the grand porticoed entrance, and saw the waiting footman in the hall; it reminded her a little of the plenitudes of the past.

"Can I see Mrs. Anstruther?"

She was dressed in plain black cashmere, black bonnet and scarf; but there was a something in her bearing which made the servant suppose she came of high degree.

"My mistress is in the grounds, madam," he replied, respectfully. "If you will kindly come into the drawing-room I will send in word of her."

But Florence drew back; she did not think Misses Ludd and Hillier's assistants usually entered the drawing-rooms.

"I have come to see Mrs. Anstruther on business," she said, simply, with a little stress on the last word. "I am quite ready to wait until she is at liberty."

The man led the way across the tiled hall to a room which seemed to Florence like an Eastern palace. The girl's artistic eye revelled in the beauty before her; she never needed the

flight of time; she seemed drinking in the loveliness of the scene. Rising at last to get a better view of some curiosity, she saw a picture which made her very heart stand still.

Yet it was no work of art, no *chef d'œuvre*, only a portrait of a young girl in the first dawn of her womanhood, dressed in the costume of twenty years before. No wonder Florence started. It seemed to her that the portrait was her own, the face was hers—hers as she had been fifteen months before, when she was a careless schoolgirl. The one word "Doris" was engraved beneath the picture; and then Florence understood all—the likeness was not hers, but her mother's. But how could it be so? What link had bound her fair, sorrowful young mother to these rich and prosperous Anstruthers? What place had the portrait of the lonely woman in Caroline-street in this home of Eastern splendour? She could not solve the question, she could only pray that her resemblance to the picture might not be so clear to the Anstruthers as it was to her, when she heard the rustle of a silken train, and the lady of the house appeared.

Florence need not have feared her greeting. Mrs. Anstruther was now not far from fifty years of age; her face was full of motherly kindness, and had a strange, wistful expression as though, despite her wealth, her husband's love, she needed something more to make her happy.

She was not discontented, not murmuring, only she never forgot that six little graves in different foreign burial grounds were all that remained to her of her children.

She looked at Florence inquiringly.

"I am very glad to see you—may I ask your name?"

Florence flushed.

"I have come on business," she said simply; "about some hangings for a window."

Strong surprise was on the lady's face.

"You do not mean that you have come from a shop in Conduit street?"

"Yes, Ludd and Hilliers."

"Are you one of their assistants?"

"Not precisely. I do not serve in the shop. I work for them at home, but to-day they had no one else to send, and so I offered to come."

"It was very kind of you. The General and I want to make our home as beautiful as we can."

"I think you have done that already."

Mrs. Anstruther smiled.

"It is our hobby. We are growing old; and I don't think we have a relation in the world."

Florence looked her interest and rose to follow Mrs. Anstruther; she had been sitting in the shade before. Now, as the sunlight caught her hair and turned it for a moment to waves of gold, her companion gave a great start.

"I beg your pardon, but I had been wondering ever since I came in of whom you reminded me—I see now."

She stood before the picture and called Florence to her side.

"I never saw such a startling resemblance!"

"Chance likenesses are strange things."

But Mrs. Anstruther was not to be put off.

"You might have sat for it."

In vain Florence moved towards the door.

"I wonder if the General will see it as plainly as I do. You see, poor Doris was his sister—not mine."

"Is she dead?"

"She died a great many years ago, and she was very unhappy."

Again Florence felt certain she was listening to her mother's story.

She went to the boudoir and the rare Eastern silks were examined. Florence's taste and skill proved quite equal to the occasion. Mrs. Anstruther was delighted.

"You seem to know things just by looking at them. Have you been doing this sort of thing long?"

"Not very long."

"Two or three years?"

"Two or three months."

"Ah," looking at her black dress; "I ought not to have asked. And do you like it?"

"Pretty well."

"Do you live at home all by yourself? It's very hard for you, a young girl like you."

"I am getting used to it," said Florence, simply. "I could not have borne to be with strangers while"—her voice shook—"my husband is away."

Mrs. Anstruther stared.

"Your husband! Why, you look a perfect child—you can't be a married woman?"

"I was married last December."

"And where is your husband? Why doesn't he stay at home and take care of you?"

Florence was saved all reply to the ever embarrassing questions by the entrance of no less a person than the General.

For a moment their eyes met—the master of untold wealth, the girl who toiled hard for daily bread. Florence saw a fine soldierly man of sixty, with a face full of kindness and good temper. General Anstruther saw, as it seemed to him, his fair young sister as he had parted from her on her wedding-day.

"My dear Isabel," he said, in a strangely-broken voice, "who is this young lady?"

His wife understood his emotion, and answered that rather than his question.

"Then you see the likeness, too? It was not only my fancy!"

"I see someone with my sister's face." He bent over Florence with stately courtesy. "I hope you will pardon an old man's curiosity and tell me your name."

"Florence."

For the life of her she could not have added a second name—her father's, the one Alan had given her at the altar; and the one she bore now alike seemed impossible to her.

"Florence!" there was a strange sparkle in the old man's eye. "Isabel, don't you remember that was her child's name. She wrote to us while we were at Malta that she had called her baby Florence."

"Yes," said Mrs. Anstruther, simply; "but I thought someone—a Mrs. Fox, I think—wrote afterwards and told us that the little girl died when she lost her mother."

A sudden impulse seized on Florence. These were her mother's kindred—the very tie which Alan accounted shame would win their hearts towards her. She looked into Mrs. Anstruther's face with her sweet brown eyes.

"Do you know Mrs. Fox?" she asked. "She is my aunt. I lived with her after papa died, until I married."

The General wiped his eyes.

"There!" he cried, triumphantly.

"I felt it must be so," answered his wife. "My dear," to the girl, "if you are Colonel Warburton's daughter, you are our dear niece, the child of my husband's sister whom we lost long years ago."

Florence felt like a creature in a dream. She was sitting on a sofa at her aunt's side. The General paced up and down before them, as though he could never tire of looking at his niece.

"Do you remember your mother, child?" he asked abruptly; "but of course you don't. How could you when she died so long ago."

"She only died last May," said Florence sadly. "She lived on alone in want and penury. They taught me to believe her dead. It was only last November, three days before my wedding, that she came to me and told me."

"Poor Doris,"—the General blew his nose; "it was a wasted life."

"And then she lived with you," said Mrs. Anstruther, "until her death?"

"Oh, no, she would not let me tell any one she was alive; she bound me by a solemn promise to keep the secret. She said that a shadow rested on her name—that she could never take her old place again."

"And your husband, child?" said the General sharply; "how comes it that you are working for your bread? Why, your father's savings alone would be a small fortune!"

"My husband!" a sob came in her voice,

"You must not blame him ; he is all that is good and true."

"Where is he ?" asked the General, tersely. "Why does he let you go wandering about the world alone ?"

And then she sobbed out her story ; how that the man she loved had been too proud to bear with her when he learned the secret of her mother's life ; how he had offered her a liberal portion of his riches ; but his love and companionship never more.

"He must be mad !" said the General, passionately. "If your mother's story were known to all the land no one could reproach her. She was like the hero of Shakespeare's play 'stung to death by slanderous tongues.'

Florence shook her head.

"You won't tell him," she pleaded. "If he found out he might send his lawyer again to offer me money—and I couldn't take it. I think that it would kill me !"

"Tell him !" an honest indignation sounded in the General's voice. "I'd scorn to speak to the man who deemed my sister Doris a disgrace, and left his wife to work for her bread !"

"She must never do that again !" said Mrs. Anstruther, taking Florence into her arms and kissing her. "She must be as our very own daughter now."

She ought to have been happy—loving, tender parents, a luxurious house offered her at one moment ; but love is stronger than aught else. Even then her heart ached—ached for the sound of her husband's voice.

CHAPTER XVIII. AND LAST

The lodgings at Camden-town were deserted. Medames Judd and Hillier lost their talented embroideress. Briarley Park received a new inmate, and the household were publicly informed that the young lady known to them as Mrs. Warton was their master's niece and adopted daughter.

So Florence once more found herself the inmate of a luxurious home. The General and his wife lavished every care and tenderness on her love could dictate. To one she seemed the image of his beautiful young sister, while the other accepted her as the substitute for the little daughters who had faded beneath an Indian sky. The very day she came one point was settled—the sorrow of her life, the estrangement from her husband, was never to be touched upon. The General and his wife declared they would never even ask his name.

"If he could cast you from him for such a cause he must be heartless," said her uncle. "Isabel and I will take what care of you heart and love can, and you must try your best, my poor child, to forget the past."

"I shall never do that, Uncle Denis !" she answered, simply. "He is my husband, and I shall love him till I die."

"Ugh !"

"You would like him if you knew him ; he is so brave and true."

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear, I don't want to know him ; I won't even hear his name. Our one object now must be to cheer you up and make you happy."

She did not tell him that for her happiness was over—that never while she lived would joy come to her heart again. She looked into his face and thanked him. She smiled when he told her his little stories of bygone days ; she laughed at his jests, and was grateful to him for his presents, and in a month he loved her almost as a daughter, and little suspected the true misery at her heart. His wife's eyes were keener—she, too, loved Florence ; but she was a woman, and she could read the girl's feelings as though by instinct. She knew quite well that nothing in all the world—not even her baby's love—would comfort Florence for the loss of her husband's love.

"Dear," she said to her one bright October day, "we cannot make you happy ; your uncle thinks you are contented, but I can see that you are like a bird in a cage—a little bird that beats its wings against the cage and longs for freedom."

"Don't say that, aunty. Indeed, indeed, I am not ungrateful ; but sometimes I think the power of being happy has left me for ever."

"And you are not twenty !"

"No ; only a year ago I was so happy, I think no girl in all the world was ever happier. Alan loved me so ; he seemed to live only for me."

"Florence, do you think all reconciliation is impossible ? Your uncle declares nothing can undo the past ; he blames your husband, and says nothing in the world can excuse his conduct. But, my darling, you love him, you are still eating your heart away because you are separated from him."

Florence burst into tears.

"That's just it," she sobbed ; "I can't bear to think that I may live years and yet be no nearer him—that for all time we are apart—that no summer sun or winter frost will see us together."

"And he told you he could never love you again ?"

She shook her head.

"We had been divided for months—a shadow seemed to have crept between us. I think the very knowledge of my secret made me unable to dispel it. Then one morning I heard that my mother was very ill, and I went to see her."

"And he discovered it ?"

"I suppose so. I meant to tell him all that night ; the concealment was more than I could bear."

"And you did not tell him ?"

"I could not. He never came. As I sat expecting him they put a letter in my hands. It was a cruel letter, he said he knew my secret, and he could never bear to see me again. His lawyer would call in the morning to make all arrangements for my comfort."

"Then he was a rich man ?"

"I suppose so. I don't think I ever cared about that."

"But you lived comfortably—you had no hardships ?"

"I had every luxury money could provide. Alan lavished things on me just as uncle Denis does now. I went a great deal into society ; I was hardly ever at home."

Mrs. Anstruther started.

"Then your husband was not in any business or profession ?"

"Oh no, he was a nobleman. I forgot you did not know his name. If my little child is a boy, he will be a viscount."

Mrs. Anstruther marvelled. She had had very hard thoughts of her nephew of marriage, but the news of his rank softened them. For an Earl, whose name is in every one's mouth, to have a scandal attaching to his mother-in-law must be very trying. It increased the difficulties of the position if Florence were indeed a Countess, her child must be heir of a noble name. Was it right to leave the father in ignorance of its very truth ?

Florence understood her.

"If I am dying," she whispered, "I trust to you to send for him. I couldn't die without his arms round me. If I were really dying he must forgive me."

There was a look on her face which seemed to say she would welcome death itself gladly for the sake of that forgiveness. Mrs. Anstruther kissed her fondly, and left the room.

One week later the child, whose advent Alan would have rejoiced over, lay in his cradle, the little heir for whom no father's embrace was ready.

"Ought we to let him know ?" asked Mrs. Anstruther, of her husband. "The hardest heart must relent towards Florence now ; and surely he would be proud of the little heir !"

The General shook his head.

"It's my belief he's a bad lot, whoever he is," he said, firmly. "Send for him if the poor child wishes it, but it's my belief she won't. And she did not."

Mrs. Anstruther herself put the question—put it with all a mother's tenderness.

"I don't want to be forgiven just for my boy's sake, whispered Florence. "If I get

weaker, if there is any danger, then send for him, but, unless, I would rather not."

So no tidings were sent to Alan. Florence recovered quickly, and the little child became the idol of the doting old couple, who lavished on him all the tenderness of their hearts. He was christened in the little village church, the General being his godfather, and he received the names of Alan Anstruther, Florence thinking a little sadly that the first was the only thing he would have of his father's.

Her husband's rank had not been communicated to the General. His wife understood him thoroughly, and as the one subject which interested him was his niece's husband, she avoided it steadily.

The December days were fairly begun when the General came home from London in an unwonted excitement.

"You remember Alan Dane, Isabel ?"

"The young *ataché* who saved your life at Constantinople seven years ago ? I am not likely to forget him. Denis, I pray for him every morning."

"I met him to-day."

"And how is he ? Is he making any stay in England ? Is he coming to see us ?"

"He looks well enough, but awfully altered—ten years older than he has any right to be. Fancy, Isabel, he has come into the family honours—he is Lord Elsdale now, one of the richest peers in England."

"Is he married ?"

"I don't know. I suppose not. I asked him to come here and spend a week. No, he can't be married or he would have offered to bring his wife."

Florence had not been present at this conversation. Her aunt went in search of her—she was sitting in her dressing-room with her baby in her arms.

"We are to have a visitor to-morrow, dear—a young man who was almost like our son when we were at Constantinople. He saved your uncle's life."

"And he is coming to see you ? How nice for you !"

"He is coming for a week. I thought, my darling, I had better warn you lest it should be anyone you had known in your married life. Mr. Dane has come to the family honours since we parted—he has become Lord Elsdale."

Florence sprang to her feet with a gasping cry of surprise.

"It is my husband !"

"Florence !"

"I told you he was good and true—that his harshness to me was his only fault. You will believe me now, aunty ?"

Mrs. Anstruther wrung her hands.

"My dear, what am I to do ? I wouldn't pain you for the world, but how can I put him off ?"

"You mustn't put him off ! I will dine upstairs while he is here, and stay a great deal in the nursery—we need never meet. Oh, aunt, it makes me happy only to think I shall be beneath the same roof as Alan !"

"If only he could see you," said Mrs. Anstruther ; "if only you would meet him !"

Florence shook her head.

"It would only be pain for us both !"

"But—"

"Alan is not a man to change."

"Well, I can't help hoping you may meet, and things arrange themselves."

"Indeed, you must not hope it !"

"What shall I tell your uncle ?"

"That Lord Elsdale knows my husband, and I dare not risk a meeting with him."

The General shrugged his shoulders when this message reached him.

"That's the best thing I've heard of the fellow. Yet he can't be so very bad if he knows Alan Dane."

The months which had passed since the Earl's visit to Keston had been full of pain. Little by little hope had died out of his heart. In vain Cecil Fane and his winsome wife (from whom the truth could not long be kept) tried to cheer him. A fixed conviction took possession of his mind that he should never see his wife again

And, oh, how he had loved her! Oh, how he loved her still! It seemed to him that day by day he missed her more; that when the anniversary of his wedding came round the wound was as keen and deep as when he first lost all clue to her.

He was not at all anxious to accept General Anstruther's invitation; but the old officer would take no denial, and there was something so hearty and genial in his manner that it cheered the lonely man in spite of himself.

"We are quite alone!" concluded the General. "No one but my niece and her little boy. I don't know if you are fond of children—he's a splendid fellow. I feel as if I was his grandfather."

Alan laughed; he really could not help it.

"I shall hope to make his acquaintance to-morrow, sir."

He certainly had no cause to complain of his reception. The General himself was waiting on the platform, and conducted him to the Park. Mrs. Anstruther and afternoon tea were waiting in the drawing-room (from which, by accident or design on the part of the lady of the house, the picture of Doris Warburton had been carefully removed). Very warm was the greeting bestowed by Isabel Anstruther on the man who had saved her husband's life; warmer even than it would have been had she not listened to Florence's confidence. She received Alan to-night in a two-fold capacity—he was the General's preserver; but he was also the husband of Florence, and little Alan's father. Lord Elsdale noticed the absence of the niece; but forbore to remark it.

"I dare say she's a motherly woman," he reflected to himself as he sat sipping his tea, "who spends all her leisure time in the nursery, and will come down to dinner presently dressed in hopelessly bad taste, and entertain us with baby-talk all the evening."

But he was disappointed when he returned to the drawing-room; the husband and wife were alone, and when they went down to dinner, he saw at a glance that the table was only laid for three.

"I thought you had a niece staying with you?" he said to his hostess.

"Yes, this is her home for the present. It is a great pleasure to us to have her."

"Shall I not see her?"

"I must ask you to excuse her. She is not very strong, and she leads a very retired life."

The servants had left them now, and dessert was on the table.

"I understand," said Alan, gravely; "she is a widow, and you are taking care of her and her little child."

Mrs. Anstruther answered nothing. Alan understood that the subject was a painful one, and introduced another.

But it was to be recurred to again that night. When the hostess had retired, and the two gentlemen were sitting over their wine, the General said, suddenly,

"I wonder if you would do me a favour, Alan?"

The Earl never hesitated.

"I would only be too glad!"

"You must not think I asked you here for this purpose; until this morning I was quite ignorant that it lay in your power to oblige me."

"I can only repeat, sir, that any favour I can do for you will be one to myself."

The General played with his wine glass.

"You heard what my wife said just now about our niece?"

"Yes."

"And you imagined she was a widow?"

"I certainly gathered so."

"You were mistaken. Her husband is alive, only he happens to be a heartless wretch—he has deserted that poor child. Well," wiping his spectacles "I call it a good riddance; but she doesn't happen to think so. Now I am a rich man, and that girl and her child is all I have. Don't you think if the husband learned that his wife was my sole heiress he would return to her?"

"He might; but I doubt if it would be for her happiness."

"That is what I want you to tell me. He is an intimate friend of yours—the poor girl told my wife so last night; she said she could not bear to meet you because it would recall the days when she saw you in her husband's house. Now I want you to tell me which is best—to leave the fellow alone, or try and touch his heart?"

"I think you are mistaken, General. I am quite sure I have no friend who has deserted his wife. I have very few intimate friends. What is his name?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You cannot tell it me?"

"I wouldn't hear it. I know his first name is Alan; because nothing would please Floy but that the boy should be christened so."

Lord Elsdale started up, a strange light in his dark eyes. He hardly knew what he was about, only a hope had come to him, so new, so wonderful, it made him another man.

"Let me see her?" he cried.

"See her! I have just told you she can't bear it. You would remind her of her husband."

Alan put one hand on the old man's shoulder.

"General Anstruther, I lost my wife seven months ago through a cruel mistake. I have sought her madly, frantically, since, as men do seek what they hold dearest in this world. Her name was Florence. Now do you understand what wild hopes your words have raised in me?"

"But it can't be—"

"Let me see her!"

As in a dream he followed the General upstairs. The old man pointed silently to a door, and went away. Alan pushed it open and went in.

A girl sat by the fire reading—a girl in a soft blue cashmere dressing-gown, with her bright brown hair floating round her like a golden cloud.

"Florence!"

She looks up. It is Alan's voice, but there is no coldness, no anger in it; it has all its old ring of passionate tenderness, his eyes are full of love.

"My darling," he murmured, "do you know I have been seeking you for months?"

She answers nothing, words will not come.

"I was a fool, an idiot!" he murmurs. "I thought you loved Cecil."

"You thought that?"

"Ay; it drove me nearly mad. I learned the truth at last. I heard from my cousin the secret you kept back from me; I went to Caroline street to find you. I never loved you better, dear, than then!"

His arms are round her, her fair head has found its true home again upon his shoulder; but she does not speak. Perhaps she fears that words will break the spell, and waken her from this dream of bliss to life's cruel realities.

"You will come back to me, my darling?" he cries. "You loved me once; my harshness can't quite have killed your love!"

And then she finds her voice.

"I shall love you till I die!"

The next season London was again graced by the fair presence of Lady Elsdale. No one ever heard the true reason for her abrupt disappearance the previous spring; but every one declares with one voice that she is lovelier than ever.

Those who gaze deeper say that she is happier, too. Many voices pronounce her and her cousin, Mrs. Cecil Fane, the most charming and contented of matrons. It may be so; but Florence's marriage has memories Flossy's will never know—nothing will ever quite blot out the recollection of the loneliness which preceded her boy's birth. But that recollection has no sadness for her now; she knows that Alan loves her just as he did when he asked her to be his—she knows that no shadow of her mother's story has ever troubled

him; that society considers him fortunate to have won General Anstruther's heiress; but the crown came to her happiness one cold winter's day, when she held her second child in her arms, and it was a little daughter.

"Shall we call her Isabel, after my aunt, or Emily, after yours?" she asked Alan.

"Neither," he answered, with a strange smile upon his face. "Darling, we will name our little treasure Doris!"

She answered him by a bright look of love, and as he bent to kiss her a sweet content filled her heart—she knew then that for all time her husband had forgiven HER GREAT MISTAKE.

[THE END.]

FOUND WANTING.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THERE, Maddie, there's news," exclaimed Pelham Clifford, rushing upstairs into his wife's drawing room, with a letter in his hand. "Christine writes they will come up to Charing-cross Hotel to-morrow, and go down to Dover the next day."

"En route for where?" drawled Maddie. "You always tell your news in halves, Pel."

"Why, to Cannes—I told you that before."

"Excuse me, you did nothing of the sort. However, I am very glad Dr. Hall at last allows Albert to go."

Pelham's delight was chilled by her excessive coolness, for which he could not at all account, not having keen insight into the vagaries of this capricious young lady. She had been so struck with terror and dismay when she first heard of what still passed for an accident, so full of remorse, so anxious while Delmar lay between life and death, that Pelham supposed she would be as rejoiced as he was to hear that the doctors thought health so far advanced as to sanction a winter and spring in Cannes. He thereby made no allowance for Maddie's peculiarities. The pressure of fear, for her husband and herself—for in her best moments she seldom lost sight of that little person—being removed, she had time to reflect that Pelham was ridiculously anxious about Christine, and thought a great deal more of her than of his own wife—indeed there had been some scenes between the two. And, besides a woman like Maddie never forgives a whilom lover for being able to live without her, and Pelham in the innocence of his heart had told her the substance of some words that had passed between himself and Delmar only a few days ago.

Delmar having told him that he was soon to be ordered abroad, Clifford had asked hesitatingly about Christine's movements, and Albert had answered, "Christine will go with me—I could not spare her." Pelham in reporting this to Maddie, had remarked that he thought the relations between Albert and Christine were changed.

"Do you mean," Maddie asked sharply, "that they are good friends? I do dislike hints."

"I believe they are," Pelham answered; "it wasn't merely Albert's words—it was the way he said them."

"Well, if Christine doesn't manage him better than she did they won't be friends long," said Maddie, as if she could have given Christine a course of instructive lectures on the subject. Pelham, indignant at Maddie's stupid persistence in her idea that Christine was in fault, had blazed out in defence of his sister; he was annoyed, too, at Maddie's incredulity. She had retorted, and some sharp truths being said on either side, the scene ended in a storm of feminine tears. Pelham, man-like, thought that when there was a reconciliation—and by-the-bye, he was getting rather tired of these last—Maddie would rejoice with him, and never imagined what was meant by her coldness on the present occasion.

"I should like to see them off," he said.

"Dear me, why? If Albert is well enough to travel, he is well enough to take care of Christine—and, besides, Evans and Fanny will be with them."

"Albert isn't well enough to have the least trouble. He is anything but strong. Besides, I did not say it was necessary—I said I should like to."

"You need not take me up so. Go if you like. Ever since Albert was ill you have been backwards and forwards to Knightsbridge Millwood as if telegrams were no use, and you must hear by word of mouth how he was, or whether Christine was still alive. I suppose it doesn't matter leaving me alone again. It's all very fine to say you three had the worst time. I don't know that—I had no one here to take care of me or sympathise, and I might be supposed to feel it a little—my own husband perhaps a murderer, and Albert dying."

"Maddie, that is not quite true. I was constantly at home, but how could I rest here when every minute almost might make me a murderer?"

"You might have thought of me. I was left in suspense."

"Telegraphed constantly."

"And shut out as if I had no concern with it at all," pursued Maddie, as if he had not spoken. "I suppose if I had offered to see him Christine would have been jealous."

"Jealous! Bah! If he had wanted to see you she would never have said him nay. I don't believe he did. As to concern you had a good deal too much."

"It's like a man to say that, and like you especially. I wonder who persuaded me," said Maddie, tauntingly; "and after all, I dare say I could have got on with Albert."

At length Pelham, with something like an oath, kicked a footstool over angrily in his passage to the door, and stalked out.

At breakfast the next morning Maddie announced her intention of calling at the Charing Cross Hotel to say good-bye. Pelham said it was not necessary. Maddie replied it was only a proper attention.

"Delmar will be knocked up, and Christine busy," objected the husband.

"If she is I can assist her," was the serene response of the wife.

"Well, Maddie," he said, at last, "if you will have it, I don't think either of them will care about it."

"Which means you are jealous. Now I think it would be very much more mashed for me to stay away."

There was enough truth in this to silence Clifford; but he had his revenge in saying again he should go down to Dover.

Maddie carried out her intention, dressed herself in a charming costume, and drove alone to the hotel, Pelham declining to accompany her. Christine received her, thanked her for coming, and said she would send to tell Albert she was there; he was only gone to see the papers.

Maddie protested, secretly sorry she had come, wishing with all her heart she could emulate Christine's graceful ease. Now that she was actually here, now that Albert might come in any moment, her "proper attention" assumed the form it had held to her husband, and she heartily wished herself home again. Even the feeling that she was exquisitely dressed did not relieve her.

Christine, in her close-fitting, dark blue travelling dress, and carrying herself more like a Southern than an English woman, looked beautiful enough to win any eyes, be they man or woman's; from Maddie.

The latter began praising Colin, who lay at his mistress's feet—the handsome brute formed such a convenient theme to allay nervousness. She asked where Albert had got him, and did not like to add that he had not had him at Daneswood when she was at Knightsbridge. She was somehow half afraid of Christine.

The answer, that Colin came from Stratford, disconcerted her. Then Colin picked up his silky cap and walked to the door, looking up expectantly; and when his master

came in with a "Well, Colin!" acknowledged the notice with an extra importance of gait.

Maddie, as she rose, could have uttered an exclamation—the Albert she saw now seemed so changed from the Albert she had watched for daily at the white house. He was very pale, showing plainly signs of the struggle, mental and physical, he had barely come through, his movements measured, like those of a man who is half afraid to move. She remembered with a pang the careless, free step with which he had swung up the road to the gate. As usual, she waited for his lead, uncertain how he would meet her—not with the silence, the broken words of last time she soon saw.

There was not a tremor in his hand as he touched hers; not a sign of finching in the clear eyes that looked straight into hers. He was unembarrassed—simply the well-bred gentleman meeting a friend. She could only murmur, as she resumed her seat, "She was so glad he was better."

"Thanks," Delmar answered, sitting down near his wife; "it is very good of you to give us a look before we go."

Maddie felt that there was more in the words than lay on their surface—that with a woman's intuition he had mentally gauged her; she was the more certain of it when he began the conversation, throwing Christine into the background, as if he were determined she should not be put to the indignity of forming a subject of curious observation to the woman who had been her rival. Maddie inwardly chafed, and showed it unconsciously to the man who as her lover had learned to read every inflection of voice and change of face. He was cool and quiet, whatever it cost him.

"Well," said Maddie, as she stood up to go—the position was insupportable for long—"we shall hear how the journey has passed. You take the dog too?"

"Oh, yes—Colin would break his heart if he did not go," said Delmar.

Maddie stooped to pat the tawny head.

"Almost as inseparable as your wife," said she, half archly, but with an almost unconscious sneer.

She was looking up in her old bewitching way—the shade of her hat enriching the tint of her face. Delmar looked down at her steadily. If he had ever since his illness half-fear'd her power over him was not quite gone, the fear died in this moment. He saw the charm, felt it in a certain degree, but it did not move him—a sure test than if the charm itself had been unperceived. As he answered her, he dropped his hand on Christine's shoulder as she stood beside him—both women felt the action to be deliberate.

"Not quite," he said; very gravely; "the one tie must be broken."

The pause, the unbroken conclusion, thrilled to the heart of the one woman—the other gave her head a little amused toss, and laughed a short laugh. She took leave rather hurriedly; Albert must not come down with her—it was not necessary—her cab was waiting. Albert, however, only held the door open for her, and followed her out. When he came back he sat silent for minutes, then came and leant over the back of Christine's chair, and the girl smiled up at him gratefully.

"Christine, don't thank me," he said; "after all, I, not Maddie, placed you in the position."

"Was that the thought that made you look so gloomy?" asked Christine, half-smiling again.

"Partly—not altogether. She made me angry for you and more than ever disgusted with myself. I kept comparing you two all the while, and afterwards I was wondering how I could have ever put her before you. For myself I am glad she came."

"Why!" with her large eyes a little surprised.

"You think it tried me. So it did, but sometimes," he said, "I have mistrusted myself—afraid if I saw her again some of the old glamour would come over me. Now I have proved myself—you may trust me still."

"I know it; Albert—I trusted you then," the girl answered gently.

Maddie, when she reached home, found her aunt Elmhurst there, and told her story in a scrofulous fashion. "Really one would have thought I had no business there," she said, laughing; "Albert, I am certain, resented it. How is he looking? Oh, handsomer than ever, if that is possible. I should have said something pretty as Pelham's wife, about that horrid affair—shooting him, I mean—but I was afraid to—I couldn't imagine how he'd take it. Fickle men are, to be sure. Not that it matters to me, of course—if he cares for Christine and she chooses to forgive him, I'm sure I'm very glad."

"I hope you are, my dear," said the aunt, dryly.

She was not blind to the little angry sparkle in her niece's brown eyes.

(To be continued.)

FACETIES.

Lost at sea.—The sight of land.

A PHYSICIAN said, jocosely, to a policeman one evening: "I always feel safe when I see a policeman in the evening, for there is no danger about." "Yes, safer than I feel when I have a doctor about," was the bright retort.

A HEALTH journal advises, "Do not lie on the left side." This is a very proper admonition. If you are obliged to lie, be careful and lie on the right side. You will find it pays in the end.

The hotel-waiter's costume still remains the standard for a man's full-dress. To prevent mistakes at parties, however, the waiter is directed to carry a towel on his arm instead of a young lady.

"Was Byron killed by the doctors?" asks a London medical journal. If he read his manuscript poems to the doctors, he probably was, and an impartial jury, even at this late day, would render a verdict of "justifiable homicide."

"Your cheek is an awful temptation to me," he exclaimed, as he looked admiringly at her fresh young face. "Your cheek must be an awful burden to you," she replied, glancing at him suspiciously; and the fresh young man withdrew.

A NEW EXCUSE.—A working engraver has killed his wife with a blow of his graver. The judge says to him, "Accused, everything proves the premeditation. You took your graver from your workroom before going home, and you pretend that you love her!" "Yes, judge, and it was to engrave my love at the bottom of her heart!"

"Miser, howdo you sell sugar?"—"Four-pence a pound, sir?"—"Can't give it. I'll drink my coffee without sugar, and kiss my wife for sweetening. Good-day, sir!"—"When you get tired of that kind of sweetening, please call again."—I will." He called next day.

A BARRISTER, not over young or handsome, examining a young lady witness in Court, determined to perplex her, and said, "Miss, upon my word you are very pretty." The young lady very promptly replied, "I would return the compliment, sir, if I were not on the witness-box."

A very little boy was driving a cow along a country road, to the alarm of a city lady, who was on a stroll in the capacity of a summer boarder. Shrinking into the corner of the fence, she asked, "Little boy, does that cow ever hurt people?" Swelling with importance at being appealed to as an authority, he answered, consolingly, "Sometimes she don't!"

A MILLER had his neighbour arrested upon the charge of stealing wheat from his mill; but, being unable to prove the charge, the court adjudged that the plaintiff should apologize to the accused. "Well," said he, "I've had you arrested for stealing my wheat. I can't prove it, and I'm sorry for it."

SOCIETY.

The Queen spent the season of general rejoicing, and festivity in the quietest manner possible this year, the customary celebrations at Osborne being considerably curtailed. Not only, too, have the Royal Family spent their Christmas in an unusually quiet manner, but the merry-makings amongst the members of the Royal household have been less extensive than ordinarily.

The Queen is very fond of walnuts, in their season, and always has a dish of them prepared, with the shells removed, and every bit of brown skin taken off, leaving the nut white and whole. This is rather a difficult process, but it is done in the stillroom at Osborne, by putting the shelled nut into a little hot water to make the skin peal off more easily.

We are pleased to hear that the Marquis Conyngham was sufficiently recovered to receive a few days ago a shooting party at Bifrons. The game shot was, by the Marquis's directions, distributed among the tenantry, tradesmen, and local charitable institutions of the neighbourhood.

Mrs EVELYN FARRELL, on the occasion of her marriage, wore a handsome dress of ivory satin, trimmed with Limerick lace and pearl embroidery. The bridesmaids' dresses were of ruby velvet, trimmed with cream colour lace; Gainsborough hats, and satin muffins en suite. Among the wedding presents was a costly silver tea service, presented by Archdeacon Farrar's parishioners to the bride.

We understand that their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales will arrive at Criche on their promised visit to Lord and Lady Arlington on Monday, the 21st prox., the visit, which is to be of a private character, extending till the following Thursday. As at present arranged, there is to be a grand shooting party. His Royal Highness has promised to pay a special visit to Viscount Portman. The noble viscount, who has for some time been in a delicate state of health, has for many years been president of the Duchy of Cornwall.

The ball at Hatfield on Thursday, the 20th December, was very brilliant, and more than usually full, as the invitations were "to meet their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Albany." The company began to arrive at ten o'clock, and included the county families from all sides of Hertfordshire. A special train from London conveyed some of the guests, while another brought visitors from the other side of the country. The Duke and Duchess of Albany had been the guests of the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury since the previous Tuesday, and a very large party were staying in the house.

The magnificent suite of apartments were lighted by electric light. A band was stationed in the long gallery, as well as in another room, in both of which dancing went on during the evening, as the crowd was so great that all available space was needed for dancing, as no less than nine hundred visitors were present. The Duchess of Albany wore a dress of bright canary-coloured tulle over satin trimmed with bronzed foliage; diamond ornaments in her hair and on her dress, with a beautiful necklace of pearls and diamonds. The Marchioness of Salisbury wore white satin and brocade and a magnificent tiara of diamonds. Lady Maud Wolmer wore her bridal dress of white satin, trimmed with Brussels lace; diamond stars and ornaments. The Countess of Cowper wore a beautiful dress of white silk, covered with embossed velvet leaves of darkest green shade.

Among the dresses were a great many rich old-fashioned brocades; one specially remarked was one hundred and fifty years old, and was of blue and silver upon a cream satin ground. Several dresses of dark cardinal-red were worn. Two young ladies wore brown net skirts, with brown pompons under bodices of pale blue brocade, trimmed with brown flowers. Another dress was of sage-green, trimmed with white lace and a garland of pink roses.

STATISTICS.

EMPLOYMENTS IN INDIA.—The different callings in which the population of India, foreign as well as native, and female as well as male, were engaged on the day the census of 1881 was taken, were as follows:—Agriculturists, of course, occupy the front rank with 51,089,021 males and 18,863,726 females. Next, but after a long interval, come "labourers and others," (branch of labour undefined)—males 7,248,491, females 5,244,206. These are followed by workers in cotton and flax—males 2,607,579, females 2,877,876; workers in dress—males 2,082,191, females 733,089; domestic servants—males 2,149,699, females 651,966; workers in vegetable food—males 1,445,916, females 17,195,134. These are the only callings in which either the males or the females number over one million. Among the other interesting items are officers of National Government—males 580,185, females 6,352; officers of municipal local, and village government—males 791,379, females 17,784; army—males 811,070, females 1,682; clergymen, ministers, priests, church and temple officers—males 601,164, females 94,251; lawyers, law stationers, and law stamp dealers—males 31,628, females 10; physicians, surgeons, and druggists—males 113,579, females 75,329; authors and literary persons—males 32,177, females 3,464; artists—males 10,347, females 584; musicians—males 187,695, females 19,681; actors and actresses—males 58,807, females 40,381; and teachers—males 166,856, females 4,345. The returns for the more intelligent professions are probably pretty accurate. But just about half the total population are entered as persons of "no stated occupation." A number of these are of course wives, and children under a working age. But, considering how women and children labour in India, the proportion seems a very large one.

GEMS.

PERSEVERE in whatever calling you adopt. Your progress may be slow, and your results seemingly meagre; but that is no reason for growing faint-hearted. Remember how the little brook persistently winds its way to the river, and the river to the ocean; both reach their destination.

One thing I must tell thee, there is no such thing in the world as fortune; nor do the events which fall out, whether good or evil, proceed from chance, but from the particular appointment of Heaven; and hence comes the usual saying that every man is the maker of his own fortune.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Eggs au Gratin.—Cut some hard boiled eggs in slices, and lay them on a well-buttered dish, with grated Parmesan cheese, black pepper, and the least bit of powdered nutmeg; sprinkle some baked bread crumbs over all, put the dish in the oven, and serve as soon as the contents begin to colour.

Batter and Apples.—Pare and core six apples, and stew them for a short time with a little sugar; make the batter in the usual way; beat in the apples, and pour the pudding into a battered pie-dish. The pudding, when properly done, should rise up quite light. To be eaten with butter and moist sugar.

Brown Pudding.—Take three eggs, their weight in the shell in flour, butter, and sugar, and grate the rind of a lemon very fine; beat the butter to a cream; and the eggs, yolks and whites separately, and then together; add the butter, and keep on beating; then mix in the sugar, and lastly the flour; then beat the whole till quite light. Put into a mould, and boil an hour and a half. Serve with any fruit-sauce, or with lemon sauce.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LONDON is waking up. At length the Corporation is going to move to the relief of distressed water ratepayers. It is proposing to introduce a bill forcing the companies to rate us on our ratesable value, and to give us water by metre as well as in gross.

Some time ago it was mentioned that the great Barnum was in treaty for a purchase that would surpass even Jumbo in American interest. Money is nothing to the Yankee showman. The greater the price the greater the curiosity. He has paid over £40,000 for a white elephant, which will now, we hear, make its *début* in London.

The guarantee fund, which was considered necessary before the Health Exhibition was in a healthy position, has now been got together all but a paltry few thousands, which anyone may put his name to, and get great credit for the act, as there is, in all human probability, no chance of being called upon to pay up, as the Health Exhibition is bound to be a great success from the wide scope and attractive character that are wisely given to it.

This is evidently an age of exhibitions among nations. The seeds sown by the Prince Consort many years ago has grown a most luxuriant crop. Our own great Fisheries Exhibition has hardly closed its doors when we heard of the opening of an International Exhibition at Calcutta. It is satisfactory to learn that this undertaking has been cordially supported by the great chiefs throughout India. To avoid wounding the susceptibilities of various castes, separate hives have been provided in the refreshment department for the accommodation of the natives. It is said that the decline of the influence of caste in India is traceable to a considerable degree to the increased consumption by the natives of articles of food from European ideas. In addition to that of Calcutta, there will open next year at Rouen and Turin also international exhibitions. Melbourne will hold its International Exhibition in March next, and 1885 will witness the opening of an exhibition in Hungary. The idea is mooted of holding a Soldiers' Industrial Exhibition. Many of our regiments are noted for the excellence of their workshops, and can turn out work of a very superior kind indeed. At Lucknow there has been such an exhibition, and every conceivable trade, even fine art productions, showed up to advantage.

NATIONAL HOLIDAYS.—We have got our few general holidays, with the one great and universal holiday which, in England at least, survives all changes—the holiday which distinguishes this month from all other months—for the chief. If they could be multiplied (of course, "no more than reason"), so much the better. If, few or many, they could be made use of by individual, local, or general effort for organising recreation in each locality and community, so much the better still. In such organisation the main things to remember are—first, that the more people of the lower sort take part in the holiday the better; secondly, that such taking part can be secured, at any rate to some extent, with little reality and still less appearance of patronage or meddling on the part of the upper sort; and, lastly, that the great thing is to provide rather things to see, hear, and more or less passively enjoy, than things to do. The beautifying of cities is in itself not a small contribution towards making national holidays possible and enjoyable, all drawbacks of climate notwithstanding. It is quite possible, without borrowing Utopias either from Dr. Richardson or from Mr. William Morris, to conceive a London in which the mere opportunity of wandering about, without having any necessity of work, would be something of a holiday in itself. But it may be frankly admitted that this would be a very different London from that of Christmas 1883.—*Merry England.*

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LINA B.—Your handwriting is excellent, although some of the flourishes could be omitted with advantage.

F. M.—A suitable New Year's present for a young lady would be a work-box, or a book of poems, or a photograph album, all of which are comparatively cheap.

CARRIE M.—A hair-wash composed of eight fluid ounces of eau de Cologne, one fluid ounce of tincture of cantharides, and half a fluid drachm each of oil of lavender and rosemary, is said to be excellent. The one quoted by you is unknown to us.

M. C.—The young lady has probably unintentionally forgotten to acknowledge the receipt of the flower you sent her in the letter. A young gentleman should not consider himself aggrieved under such circumstances.

W. B.—When a person is entrusted with a letter from a friend to deliver to a third party, he is bound in honour to give it to the latter exactly as he received it, and not slip in any supplementary note, as you propose to do. This would be a most dishonourable way of acting, and one which should bring upon its perpetrator the scorn and disgust of all who know him.

M. J.—The Greeks had far higher literary and artistic gifts than any other race that has appeared in the world. In art they stand supreme; in literature they have furnished masterpieces and rules for all time; in architecture they brought their own style to perfection. Of course this does not necessarily mean that what is left of Greek art and literature is worth all that exists of art and literature besides, because all other races for two thousand years have been pupils directly or indirectly, of the Greeks in all that pertains to beauty, and have embodied much of what Greece had to teach in their own productions, and because there are fields which did not attract the Greek mind, and experiences of which the Greek knew nothing.

F. R. S.—1. The following ingredients are required in making corn-starch pudding: Four tablespoonfuls of corn-flour, one quart of milk, four eggs (the whites and yolks separate), three-fourths of a cup of sugar, one tablespoonful of butter, and nutmeg and cinnamon to taste. Dissolve the corn-starch in a little cold milk, and having heated the remainder of the milk to boiling, stir this in and boil three minutes. Take off the fire, and while still very hot add the butter. Set away until cold, beat the eggs very light (adding the sugar and flavouring), and stir into the corn-starch, beating thoroughly to a smooth custard. Put into a buttered dish, and bake for half-an-hour. Eat cold, with powdered sugar sifted over it. 2. In making bread fritters, soak two cups of fine bread crumbs in one quart of boiling-hot milk for ten minutes, in a covered bowl. Then beat to a smooth paste, add the whipped yolks of three eggs, one teaspoonful of melted butter, a salt-spoonful of soda and salt, and finally the whites of the eggs beat stiff. Fry immediately.

DAISY.—Take up the carpet and beat and shake it till all the dust is removed. Then scour the floor, allow it to dry perfectly, and relay the carpet. If any spots are visible on its surface proceed in the following manner: Put about three gills of ox-gall into a bucketful of clean, cold water having another bucket containing clean water only at hand. Rub with a soft scrubbing-brush some of the ox-gall water on the carpet, by which means a lather will be raised. When a convenient-sized portion has been treated in this way, wash the lather off with a clean linen cloth dipped in the clear water, which latter should be changed frequently. When the lather has disappeared, rub the part with a clean, dry cloth. After all is done, open the windows and allow the carpet to dry. This washing will brighten all the colours of the carpet, more especially the greens. Grease spots may be removed by applying a paste made of equal parts of magnesia, Fullers' earth, and boiling water. Lay this paste as hot as possible upon the grease spots, and let it dry. Next day brush it off, and the grease spots will be removed.

BETH.—To preserve the colour of flowers when drying the greatest care is required in changing the papers every second day, and these should always be well dried at the fire. In keeping the shape of the flowers thus preserved the utmost care and attention is necessary when arranging them on the papers. This can be done by having another piece of paper and gently laying it on part of the flower, upon which a small book should then be placed. Then lay out the other leaves in the same manner, until each part has had the gentle pressure necessary to keep it in position. Let them remain in this position for a short time, and then place a heavy weight on them. Look at them the next day, and change the damp paper. In the course of three or four days the flowers thus treated should be taken out and placed in fresh paper, with three or four sheets between every two plants, and the weights again placed upon them. This process must be continued until the specimens are completely dried. Each of them must be placed on a sheet of dry paper, upon which should be written a memorandum of the name of the plant, the place and time at which it was gathered, the character of the soil from which it was taken, and any other particulars of interest connected therewith.

W. G. B.—The 24th May, 1825, came on a Tuesday.

INQUIRER.—The reply will be given next week.

MARY, AGNES, AND KATE.—We do not insert such notices.

F. F. G.—1. Apply to the Chief Superintendent, Scotland-yard, London. 2. The fare, third-class, from Dublin (Kingstown) to London is 7s. by the North Western, 6s. by the Great Western. 3. Handwriting good.

ELLIE.—You should talk the matter over with your father and brothers. Your own youth is the principal objection that we can see to your marrying at once. A good, capable woman would make such a household as your father's happier, and your brother ought to be as ready as any one else to give your wife a welcome.

JANE.—1. Prepared chalk is a simple and effective dentifrice. Wash your hands in warm water into which some oatmeal has been placed, using the oatmeal like soap, and at night cover them with glycerine. 2. We cannot pretend to interpret dreams. 3. Clip your eyelashes once a month. Darken the eyebrows with cosmetic.

M. D. P.—The tamarind is the fruit of a large tree which grows wild in various parts of Africa and Asia, but which is now cultivated in the West Indies and in South America. The fruit is a pod, five or six inches long and as thick as a man's finger, containing a row of seeds which are surrounded by a sour juicy pulp. In the West Indies when the pods are ripe they are picked and the fruit shelled out, packed into casks, and covered with boiling syrup. In the East Indies tamarins are put up without syrup. A cooling acid drink is made from them by steeping them in water. It is often given to persons sick with fevers.

IN THE ORCHARD.

Lilian, then fair sprite,
Sunshine shadowed in with night
With thy wondrous wistful eyes,
With the winsome winning face,
Like a sunbeam from the skies,
In the orchard-shade apace—
As if from heaven descended.

The Great Artist made you well—
Took the sunbeam from the skies,
And the rainbow-tints that dwell,
Thus to make your hair and eyes.
He hath mixed his colours well:
Sunshine, shadow, smiles and tears—
Sweetly are they blended.

B. B.

G. B. F.—1. As commonly understood, a parricide is a person who murders his father or mother; one who murders an ancestor; but Blackstone applies the word to one who kills his child. A matricide is the killer or murderer of a mother; and a sororicide is the killer or murderer of a sister. A regicide is a king-killer. 2. A sovereign remedy means a remedy that has no superior.

ELIZA D.—The colour of hair is chiefly due to the pigment cells. Put into boiling water it liberates a large quantity of oil mixed with sulphuret of iron and sulphuret of hydrogen. This oil combined with sulphuret of iron imparts colour to the hair, and its absence is indicated by greyness. For this reason, sulphur is used in the various dyes for renewing the colour of grey hair.

L. J. F.—The following are the seven wonders of the world:—The Egyptian pyramids, the mausoleum erected by Artemisia, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the walls and hanging gardens of Babylon, the Colossus at Rhodes, the statue of Jupiter Olympus, and the Pharos or watch-tower of Alexandria.

C. R. A.—1. The engagement ring is generally worn by ladies in America on the forefinger of the left hand. In this country it is the custom to wear it on the third or wedding-ring finger. 2. It is in good taste for a gentleman to raise his hat whenever he meets a lady, whether in the day-time or evening.

T. R. C.—In 1822 an "Eastern Steam Navigation Company" was formed in England, the object of which was to maintain an ocean steam-route to the East around the Cape of Good Hope. The following year the directors came to the conclusion that, owing to the cost of maintaining coaling stations on the way, such a route could not be made to pay, unless the ship could carry enough coal to last the round trip, besides a large number of passengers and a great cargo. Acting upon the idea, they employed an eminent marine architect and builder to make a plan of such a vessel, which resulted in the building of the *Great Eastern*. She was launched in 1858, and the directors determined on a trial trip across the Atlantic, the ship leaving the Thames September 8, 1859. Off Hastings, an explosion of some of her steam-pipes took place, resulting in the death of seven persons, besides the wounding of many others, and the voyage came to an end. After a winter and spring spent in costly repairs, the ship started again, leaving Southampton June 17, 1860. She crossed the Atlantic in eleven days, arriving in New York harbour on the 29th. During the remainder of 1860 and the greater part of 1861, she made several trips between the two countries, at a great loss of money, on account of the insufficiency of receipts to meet the necessary expenses. In 1864, she did good service in laying cables across the Atlantic, in the Mediterranean, in the Red Sea and other places.

LILY.—Yes, sullenness may be predicated of inanimate objects. For instance, Pope says:—

"No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows;

"The dreadful east is all the wind that blows."

K. R.—You display so much insincerity and levity that our advice to you would be not to marry at all.

When these gentlemen find out how they have been tricked, we think that they will agree with us.

N. W.—When a gentleman proposes marriage, a young lady may be pretty sure that she is beloved. If she has an overpowering desire to accept the proposal, she may be pretty sure that she reciprocates the love. It is not necessary to think anyone perfect in order to love him.

D. W.—It would be a good plan to accept an invitation from some other gentleman. Your friend certainly treats you with scant courtesy. He may be merely entertaining himself, with no intention of marrying you. We would advise you not to waste your time with one who has no serious intentions. It is time for you to show a little independence.

C. F.—Do not submit to the young man's exactions, but show more independence. If you do not he will lose his respect for you and never marry you. We advise you to assert yourself and accept other company, and let him feel and know that he will lose you unless he proposes and attends you more politely.

A. W. M.—From your own account, you have hardly acted in a manly way. You should have visited your betrothed at once and offered her a full explanation. She would probably have accepted it, and given you a full opportunity to vindicate yourself in the eyes of all. It is not too late to do this, and we advise you to return home at once. Your conduct in leaving gives colour to the belief that the aspersions of your character are true.

A. L.—Until you can obtain a proper introduction to the young lady, you must wait. You are very young. Nearly all young persons go through a similar experience. When you are a few years older you will smile when you recall writing the above letter to us. Ask your mother's advice. Probably when you become acquainted with the young lady your passion for her will vanish. Do not make any show of your feelings, or you will be come ridiculous.

E. H. D.—1. John Wesley, in a sermon on dress, made use of the following expression: "Certainly this is a duty, not a sin. Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness." Bacon, in Book II. of his "Advancement of Learning," published in 1605, uttered a somewhat similar sentiment: "Cleanliness of body was ever esteemed to proceed from a due reverence to God." 2. The lines:—

"For all sad works of tongue or pen,
The sadness of these: 'It might have been,'"

occur in one of Whittier's poems, entitled "Maud Muller," line 165. 3. John Brown was hung at Charlestown on December 1839. Cook was not executed until some time after that date.

C. H. R.—The "Cabalistic letters O. K. K. B. W. P." to which the young lady refers, are the initials of the words composing the first line of the song, "One kind kiss before we part," written by Robert Dodesley, a poor shoemaker of the town of Mansfield, Notts, who composed other lines worth remembering. It was the fashion some years ago for young ladies to sing these letters instead of the words, as their pronunciation makes the exact number of syllables necessary to the music; and it is said that a fair damsel, after buying music at a shop where a worthy young man was in attendance, turned back from the door and repeated the letters, intending thereby to ask for the one piece she had forgotten to purchase. The young man sprang over the counter and accepted the invitation literally.

EPHRA.—1. The present year is leap-year, and one in which is accorded the right of the female sex to make a proposal of marriage. This custom, however, would be more honoured in the breach than in the observance, as there are no cases known in which the lady has asserted her claim. 2. Leap-years coincide with those that are divisible by four, and they may thus be known. Of the years concluding centuries, only every fourth is a leap-year, beginning with 2,000, which is divisible by 400, as is also 2,400. 3. Your letter is written in correct style. 4. The only way to secure sparkling eyes and bright cheeks is to indulge in plenty of exercise, eat nourishing food, and avoid late hours, both in retiring and rising.

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